Author's response to reviews

Title: A study of the number of physicians registered in Jamaica and their countries of training.

Authors:

Jennifer M Knight-Madden (jennifer_knight@yahoo.com)

Version: 2 Date: 30 May 2008

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr. Todd,

Re: MS: 2000599681888038
A study of the number of physicians registered in Jamaica and their countries of training.

Thank you for your very helpful comments. I have revised the manuscript. It is now entitled ‘The accuracy of the national physician register; a study of the status of physicians registered in Jamaica and their countries of training’.

I have responded to all the detailed comments by the reviewers. The responses are included below.

I have not been able to have the manuscript professionally copyedited, but have reviewed it with assistance from a colleague.

The paper has been reformatted.

I hope the manuscript is now acceptable for publication, even if further editing is required.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Knight-Madden
Reviewer's report

Title: A study of the number of physicians registered in Jamaica and their countries of training.

Version: 1 Date: 28 March 2008
Reviewer: Amy Hagopian

Reviewer's report:

Re: 'A study of the number of physicians registered in Jamaica and their countries of training.'

Jennifer M Knight-Madden
BMC Health Services Research

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Type of submission: Research

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   The question is an important one: does the physician licensure authority in Jamaica (or any country, by generalization) accurately record and report the identity, number, and specialty designation of the nation’s physicians? I'm not sure the author summed up the question quite so succinctly, but this is clearly what she was getting at. Thank you. The aim has been rephrased as suggested.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? Are the data sound?
   The methods section of the paper is the weakest, although the methods themselves may be sound. At least one source citation is too general: “various medical associations.” The author also said “physicians known by the researchers (there was more than one??) to have migrated, retired or died who remained on the list were identified and were not included as practicing physicians.” How do we know the researcher(s) are reliable sources for this information? I have given more detail regarding the methods used and have specifically identified the sources of information. Both Professor Gray and I limited ourselves to persons with whom we had been in contact and hence we were sure of their status. This would, of course, underestimate the persons who were no longer in practice as our knowledge would be limited. This was confirmed by finding additional persons who were dead, retired and migrated in the subset which was more aggressively traced. It would, however, not lead to the incorrect classification of those physicians we identified as dead, retired or migrated.

   The random selection of 150 physicians was probably a reasonable idea, but how was the number 150 arrived at? 150 was approximately 5% of the total number. The number traced was based on resources.

3. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   The traditional sections of the paper are present, but the detail provided in methods is too scant and the results are presented in a confusing way.
Further details of the methods utilized have been added. The results have been reorganized.
The introduction should include a more thorough literature review on whether similar studies have been attempted in other countries. I know, for example, there have been several papers on the low quality of the American Medical Association masterfile, which is the source in the US that provides nationwide physician licensure data for research purposes. The background has been amplified.
Some background on the medical system in Jamaica would be helpful. For example, how many medical schools, and what is the size of the graduating class each year?
Additional background has been added.
The results should be diagrammed or tabled in a way that we can follow the numbers that flow from various sources, so we can follow the discrepancies. The results section jumps around a little and it's hard to tell where some findings came from. For example, the author says “14 physicians were found to be deceased,” but does not tell us whether this is known from the 150 sample or the author’s personal knowledge or other sources.
Now clarified by a figure
Much is made of the physicians found who were not licensed, but we don’t know how these people were uncovered. (“During the process of identifying physicians” is not a clear enough description.)
Further detail has been provided
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
The problems are described above.
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Included
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Insufficiently.***
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The title should reveal the story: “Jamaica’s medical licensure authority overestimates the number of physicians practicing in the country”
I would like some advice on this from the review team. Do you suggest that I delete the other aspects of the paper, in particular those dealing with location of training? They would not be included in the new title as suggested. I have amended the title somewhat but it is now a bit long.
9. Is the writing acceptable?
Sadly, no. There are several grammatical errors and the language needs to be tightened and improved. Many undefined acronyms (FMS/UWI/UHWI), shorthand references (“the Gleaner”). If the editor decides to accept the paper, the author should find an editor to help her. I would be glad to suggest revisions after that stage.
I have tried, with some assistance, to revise the writing.

CONCLUSION- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached). This is an important piece of research, and should be revised for resubmission. I encourage the author to 1) conduct a thorough literature review to find studies of this nature done in other countries and see what she can learn from them, and to strengthen the introduction, 2) diagram her findings on physician status in a flow chart or at least a table, 3) revise the methods section to be more thorough and clear, 4) get a professional editor to help her with the language. It’s definitely worth the effort to work on this paper and resubmit it.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.
Reviewer's report
Title: A study of the number of physicians registered in Jamaica and their countries of training.
Version: 1 Date: 9 April 2008
Reviewer: Affette McCaw-Binns
Reviewer's report:
Overall comments:
The paper while worthwhile, needs to be better organized, issues stated more succinctly, grammatical errors corrected, and the discussion expanded to include an assessment of whether her findings were unique to Jamaica or part of an international issue of maintaining accurate registers of health professionals. These issues therefore need to be addressed before I would recommend that the paper be accepted for publication. More detailed issues are outlined below.

Abstract –
Background – too verbose, can be said more succinctly. Edited.

Methods – Grammatical errors Corrected.

Results – Presentation very disorganized and unclear regarding source of data, Reorganized
she discusses a random sample but this is not included in her methods section. Included

Conclusion – Author should compare her results with similar studies to document if findings were unique to Jamaica, or an international problem. Comment added.

Strategies such as efforts to move to continuous registration through CMEs and re-registration should be discussed here also. Included.

The Paper
Background – the year of graduation of the first UWI graduates is inaccurate. Corrected

Methods –
· The first sentence does not make sense. Edited
· The language is very colloquial e.g. telephone book vs. telephone directory Edited.
· 1st paragraph, last sentence, has grammatical construction issues Edited
· Author uses abbreviations which are not defined and would not be identifiable by an international audience. These have been deleted or explained.
· The purpose of the random sample was not stated, nor was how it was selected and from what database identified Details provided.

Results
· The authors states that she identified 29 other physicians from other sources, what were these other sources? Details provided. Primarily medical association listings. These were qualified but currently unregistered physicians.
· A table comparing the contribution of the various sources and identifying the cross-listing of persons might be useful. Results simplified so that they are not confusing.

Discussion
· Discussion does not compare her results with similar studies to state whether her findings were unique to Jamaica or represents an international problem.  
**Included**

Other strategies such as efforts to move to continuous registration through CMEs and re-registration should be discussed.  
**Stressed**

· The discussion suggests that relatives or migrants should inform the MCJ (Medical Council of Jamaica) of the death or migration of a physician. That clearly cannot be expected to be their responsibility!  
**Deleted**

It should be the job of the MCJ to put systems in place to ensure that their register is up to date, using a strategy which they should determine.  
**Included.**

· There is precious little statistical difference between 8.5 and 9.6 to say that the Jamaica physician to population ratio is above the non-Latin Caribbean; it would be more accurate to say it is similar.  
**Edited.**

· There is a major distinction between being unlicensed because you haven't paid your registration fees or submitted your CME credits and practicing fraudulently by virtue of never being trained to practice medicine. One must be careful when making such comparisons.  
**Both of these are discussed.**

**Table**

· The title for Table 1 is cumbersome. A simple title might be, “Physicians practicing in Jamaica, by country of basic training”  
**Changed**

· Is there a distinction in the database between England and the United Kingdom as Ireland is also listed?  
**The different territories in UK have their own examination boards but I have combined them into one in the table.**

**Figure**

· UWI needs to be identified in a key.  
**Not sure I understand.**  
**Key is trained at UWI: yes or no.**  
**I have moved the legend into the text as instructed by the guidelines.**

The title for the figure is incomplete and should document that it is looking at the “Trends in source of training of physicians practicing in Jamaica, 1930-2006”  
**Done**

The results might also comment on the decrease in foreign graduates.  
**Included.**