Reviewer's report

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

Version: 2 Date: 29 August 2008

Reviewer: Amy Hagopian

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This is a much improved manuscript, with some remaining problems. I do hope BioMed Central will offer editing assistance to tighten up language. These include:

The title needs a colon, not a semicolon;

In the abstract, you first talk about density measurements in terms of 100,000 population, then jump to 10,000;

"which" is used when "that" is more grammatically correct;

UHWI is used as an acronym without definition, and while MCJ is defined in the abstract, I believe the convention is to do it again with the first use in the paper. In general, the paper needs to be corrected for acronym introduction and utilization;

In the background section, there is the sentence, "While facilitating the registration of specialists, they have no legislative authority to do so." Who is the "they" in this sentence?;

The word "local" is used repeatedly to describe the entire country of Jamaica;

The Table and Figure are not referenced in the text;

You spell Dr. Gray/Grey's name two different ways;

In Discussion: "There were many appropriately qualified physicians..." Define many. "MCJ currently has no active method of ascertaining this information." By "this information" do you mean people who have migrated or retired? Or other changes in status as well? In the sentence that begins, "Additionally, though the list compiled..." to what report does "this report" refer?

On page 9, use of "must be" and "should be" are troublesome. Perhaps point out the consequences of NOT ensuring or identifying, rather than making a value judgment. There are always tradeoffs in policy, and you haven't considered the possible losses required to make the gains recommended.

The date 29/12/07 isn't conventional in all countries, so I suggest 29 December
2007.

It's FEWER physicians, not less.

You say “In May 2006, more than half the doctors listed on the register had not re-registered for the year 2006.” What was their deadline?

Now, to content:

Why did three of the Regional Health Authorities not respond to your inquiries? Did you aggressively follow up? They should have helped you by providing data; shame on them. Did Dr. Gray ask them to help you?

On page 5 you mention that UHWI students don’t pay the full cost of their education; but students never do—it would be poor public policy to expect that. I’ll bet there are almost no universities where tuition covers the full cost of the education. So, your sentence might read, “As with virtually all world medical schools, students attending the University of the West Indies (UHWI) do not pay the full economic cost of their education. Regional governments subsidize medical education by providing about XX% of the annual budgets of the schools.” [where does the H come from in UHWI?]

I have trouble tracking the numbers: 2667 and 2567 and 2391. I get that 2667 physicians are registered by MCJ. Minus the 118 no longer practicing would be 2549 (that’s in the figure, good). Then we tracked 150 physicians, and discovered 22 were no longer in the country, for a total of 14.7% (22/150). If you want to correct the total for the losses you discovered in the sample, you have to correct by the percent, not by the raw number. But you can only do that if you believe your sample to be generalizable to the entire data set.

If, after doing the numbers correctly, you indeed discover the real physician density to be 9.0 rather than 9.67, I have to say that’s a not very startling finding. You say in your conclusion that there is a significant underestimate, and I just don’t buy that 2/3 of a physician per 10,000 is significant. But I think that’s not the correct number, in any case.

In the discussion, you might want to compare the 9 or 9.7 (regardless) physician density with other international physician ratios. And policy analysts now frequently speak of the number of physicians that might be required to reach the Millennium Development Goals. Two readings I direct you to are the 2006 World Health Report (WHO) on the health workforce, and Lincoln Chen’s Joint Learning Initiative work (there is a Lancet article you can find, as well as a full report).

These last might be better references for you for your point in the 2nd sentence of the background section, as well. Reference 4 is from 1977 and may no longer be relevant.

Figure 2 doesn’t have a legend; I can’t determine what it is telling me. The table has a title, but the figures don’t. (And the title for the table should read, “Licensed physicians in Jamaica as reported by the Medical Council of Jamaica, by country
of basic training, 200X.”) The sources of data should be in captions below each table and figure.

**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