Reviewer's report

Title: A comparative study of Taiwan's short-term medical missions to the South Pacific and Central America

Version: 1 Date: 7 October 2012

Reviewer: Ben White

Reviewer's report:

Overall, the authors should be commended for their efforts in attempting to improve the quality of STMMs through more effectively characterizing and defining their long experience. In addition, the extant literature is well reviewed in the introduction, and it is clear that the authors have an excellent sense for the current issues with respect to STMMs and their effects. Finally, the authors are fortunate to have a very large data set (sample size) to analyze (71 volumes over 5 years), and as such are in the position to draw some very interesting conclusions.

Major Compulsory Revisions:
1) It is worth noting that despite the above, the conclusions drawn by the authors are not surprising, like the necessity of speaking the local language, or the importance of creating sustainability through expanding capacity of local healthcare workers through train-the-trainer models and local education. In order for this manuscript to be of interest to the readership, and pass the “so what” test, it will be necessary to prove something that they do not already know, such as the potential sustainability of this work, or even something as simple as how table 6 was created, why it is so, and what can be done to improve it in the future.
2) In addition, in some cases there is a tenuous link between the results as written and the conclusions drawn. For example, the term “effective” is used frequently without a clear definition or data to support said definition. (e.g. abstract conclusions sentence 1, or the line “In this study, we used a comparative survey to investigate the effectiveness of STMMs. Our study demonstrated that the quality of clinical service provided by STMMs from multiple institutions was as effective as that of those from a single institution.” If these conclusions are to be stated, they would benefit for a clearer definition.

Minor Essential Revisions:
1) There are a few spelling errors that will be detected by a common spell-checker.
2) “Other characteristics – including funding sources, leadership, administration, logistical preparedness and orientation – carried no difference.” Carried used incorrectly.

Discretionary Revisions:
-None
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests.