Reviewer's report

Title: Human resources needs for universal access to antiretroviral therapy in South Africa: A time-motion study

Version: 1 Date: 16 June 2012

Reviewer: Norbert Dreesch

Reviewer's report:

1. The article is a welcome empirical study on the HRH implications for achieving universal access to antiretroviral therapy in one of the countries hardest hit by the HIV epidemic, South Africa. Even though the sample of three clinics for time and motion studies is small, the staffing and treatment pattern for HIV patients usually tends to differ little in other, similar environments. Thus the scenarios developed give highly relevant policy guidance for the HRH environments throughout the country.

2. The time-and-motion method applied yields highly significant results for HRH for HIV/ART planning needs and meets with relevant standards. The article contributes to the growing body of knowledge on HRH development needs for HIV/ART since some of the earlier works by e.g. Hirschhorn et al. (quoted in the study) and WHO (http://www.who.int/hrh/documents/en/HRH_ART_paper.pdf) attempted to provide estimates of HRH for scaling up access to ART at the beginning of the forced expansion strategies proposed by WHO and others as of 2003 (initial 3by5 movement).

3. The authors provide scenarios for HRH for universal access to ART, including 'treatment as prevention'. We should remind ourselves that prevention strategies involving PHC and community level action towards individual prevention measures are still likely to cause the least impact on human resources development and HIV/ART plus co-infection treatment needs, thus contributing highly to effective health systems management and reduction of the epidemic. Scaling up rapidly and towards universal access may also benefit from the option of using a human resources/health systems approach as evidenced in the case of Botswana which created a public/private partnership to rapidly increase access to human resources for HIV/ART care (reported Dreesch et al. in an earlier article in this Journal). This may, however, be less relevant for the rural context.

4. The article is well written and adheres to international standards. A few oversights (plural nouns and verb forms not corresponding) should be checked and corrected where necessary.

Level of interest: An exceptional article
Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:
No competing interests.