Reviewer's report

Title: A literature review: The Role of Private Sector Involvement in the Production of Nurses in India, Kenya, South Africa and Thailand

Version: 1 Date: 27 August 2012

Reviewer: Edith Patouillard

Reviewer's report:

An interesting article on private sector nursing supply, demand and policy contexts in 3 developing countries. My comments relate to methods, findings and discussion sections, especially regarding the provision of more details and definitions on the review inclusion criteria and review process; overview of studies identified against conceptual framework (the presentation of studies may however have been in the missing tables); presentation of findings for overall overview of findings, and comparative description of studied countries; and, further development of the authors' thoughts within discussion section/policy recommendations.

Major compulsory revisions:

1) Tables 1, 2, 3 mentioned in the text were not found in the submitted PDF accessible to the reviewer.

Method section:

Framework section:

2) Trend in supply/demand/policy outcomes: specify over which period. P3

3) Supply for nurses section:
   o add definition to density
   o clarify what the difference is between "the number of nurses produced in private sector and "the production capacity of private nurse institutions"

4) Demand for nurses section:
   o it is not clear which indicators were used to measure responsiveness to health needs - More generally, what is means by responsiveness? please provide definition. P3
   o Authors argue that demand is both domestic and international – is there more evidence available on demand from high income countries that could be added to this paragraph? Any statistics? more generally, is it feasible to extend the scope of the review to high income countries where South-African/Kenyan and Thai nurses go to such that the evidence on demand is enriched?

5) Policies: provide rationale for focus on these 3 policy aspects (quality of nurses, accreditation institutes, partnership public private)

6) is it possible to draw a list of all individual inclusion criteria that make the
framework for clarity in screening process? May be useful to think of creating a table: For example criterion 1: paper provides evidence on number of nurses; criterion 2: paper provides evidence on density of nurses, with density defined as……

Then, when results are presented, add a table with a list of all references and tick criterion that each paper addresses (see revision 7)

Findings
7) Overall, it was unclear which country had which data available as per conceptual framework. Whilst each section was clearly labelled and general content of sections was relevant to its title, some data were presented for some country and not for other, without mentioning the reason for this – reviewer assumed that this was because the authors did not find such evidence? For example, in reference to the number of nurses produced in private sector section. There are data on absolute number for South Africa as well as some %; however for Thailand only % are reported. To clarify the findings, please develop a table listing the scope of evidence / reference of the paper available for each country as mentioned above under 6) such that a comparative analysis can be more easily conducted by the readers.

Discussion section
8) Utilization of nurses graduating from private nursing institutions
o What does “orientation to national health systems” refer to? How is it measured? P7
o What is meant by “nurses’ responsiveness to health needs”? how is it measured? p7
o Same question for “nurses’ responsiveness to national health systems” and “impact on health outcomes”? how are these measured/ what is nature of evidence in the literature?

o Can the author develop their points/thoughts on
* whether nurses in private sector add value to the labour market
* whether nurses in private sector add value to health care education system

o add evidence to support statement of large profits being made by private sector institutions
o any evidence of benefits made by/in developed countries?

Policy recommendations
o Are policies all relevant to the 3 studied countries? Are there policy specificities that each country should consider?

Minor essential revisions:
1) Methods section: It is not clear what is meant by descriptive review – a review that Is not systematic? Please specify what is a descriptive review. P3
2) Findings section: Figure 2
Starting from the left hand side:
- First box stating 657,448 references retrieved – how were these retrieved if they are not the result of the search strategy? Which stage does it correspond to in the method section of the paper?
- Third box stating 463 article retrieved for more detailed xxxWORD MISSING – please add that word
- Fifth box 206 articles - is it the result of the search strategy described in method section? If yes, I am not sure how useful are the previous boxes…
- Last box: 23 papers were included for round discussions – how many were kept after those discussions?

3) typo in first paragraph , where it says “the literature reviewED did not…” p5

4) Demand for nurses section: Could move this section first in the result section to set up context on demand before turning to the supply

5) Demand for nurses section: it seems like there is a mix of supply and demand issue in this section as it refers to nursing supply in crises etc – is it possible to make a section on demand only? P6

6) P7 paragraph starting “while this may be inferred from…..question” – the meaning of the sentence is not clear. It may be an issue of punctuation. Please clarify

7) Availability of evidence section: Authors say that evidence is limited….is there therefore enough evidence to support statement that nurses produced in private sector have so many risks? Be good to soften the statement, or add relevant references. Any potential advantages reported in literature?

8) Limitation of the study section: Helpful to clarify limitations of the methods employed in the study and limitation of the results of the study, as these are different types of limitations

Conclusion

9) Can author develop what are the dynamics of the labour market?

10) Add overview on the broader context and health systems of the 3 studied countries such it sets the context in which the review was undertaken.

Discretionary revisions

1) Finding section: please add brief overview (couple sentences) on the scope of 187 articles that were excluded because of irrelevancy; add number of full text articles that were not accessible?

Specify which approach was taken for articles with no abstract - did the author screen the paper based on title only?

2) Limitations of the study section: Would move this section at start of the discussion section
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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