Reviewer’s report

Title: Forecasting nursing professions: Impacts of occupational mobility and employment structure in Germany

Version: 2 Date: 10 August 2012

Reviewer: Tomoko Ono

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The manuscript addressed the important issue of various labor force participation and working patterns for nurses and incorporate those factors as part of projection exercise. Careful assessment of nurse supply is still rare and this manuscript provides important contribution to the literature. However, the current version requires substantial work to clearly define concept and terminology, and it needs basic information of training, regulation, and scope of practice for different types of nurses in Germany to put it in the context.

Major Compulsory Revisions

There are three groups of nursing profession included in the study. First is nurse and midwives (category 853), auxiliary nurses (category 854) and geriatric nurses (category 864). In the abstract, it also list three different groups as “persons with a qualification in nursing professions”, “unskilled and semi-skilled nursing professions”. From the rest of the document, I have assumed that “persons with a qualification in nursing professions” refers nurses/midwives, and semi-skilled being auxiliary nurses and unskilled as geriatric nurses in order to understand the full document. However, this was never clearly defined in the document and create substantial confusion understanding the manuscript. I also found that calling auxiliary nurses/geriatric nurses as semi-skilled/unskilled is misleading, as those nurses still requires some level of training and they are qualified for the scope of practice of their occupation. Just simply referring all nurses with specific names (nurses/midwives, auxiliary nurses, geriatric nurses) would make the manuscript much easier to follow.

As the analysis differentiates between initial vocational qualifications vs. current occupation, authors need to explain how nursing education system works in Germany. If your initial vocational qualification were “geriatric nurses”, what do they have to do to qualify as “nurses/midwives”? Or even if they only have vocational qualification as geriatric nurses, would they be allowed to work as nurses/midwives with substantial years of experience? Without basic knowledge of Germany systems, readers have to keep guessing.

Occupational flexibility needs to be clearly defined. Because of the two problems in definition addressed above (different types of nurses, and qualification vs. current occupation), it is difficult to understand exact concept of occupational flexibility and the purpose of examining the patterns. Concept needs to be clearly
defined and the assumptions for projection exercise need to be clearly explained.

Results section, especially on occupational flexibility, needs to be explained more carefully. The hypothetical scenarios need to be clearly explained for the occupational flexibility. Who are considered as not “part of the supply” and who are considered as “potential” supply? How would the results relate to the current “real” supply/demand gap? The unclear definitions of occupational flexibility create confusion in the results section as well. For example, in p7-8, it states “if 74.8% of qualified nursing professions represent only 56.4% of employees in nursing professions, it is… clear that the demand for nursing professions cannot be covered solely by qualified nursing professions”. This sentence does not help explain Table 2 nor help to understand the overall objectives of this assessment.

Discretionary Revisions

P3-4: Discussion on the application of the method to the European Labour Force Survey may flow better if it is placed in the discussion section. Discussion on coding scheme is hard to follow and it disrupts the flow. This section should focus the methodological approach of this paper and application of the methodology can be discussed in the later section.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

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

**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