Reviewer's report

Title: Trends of Cross-border mobility of physicians and nurses between Portugal and Spain

Version: 2 Date: 27 March 2013

Reviewer: Matthias MW Wismar

Reviewer's report:

This is really an important article which should be published. It covers recent mobility trends between Spain and Portugal which are otherwise unreported in Europe. It was an interesting read from which I have benefited. I have very little comments on the facts and figures and the narrative.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. I am missing a discussion on the usefulness and feasibility of the interview methodology employed in this study. From the article I learn that it was very useful to monitor mobility trends in a very timely manner. Together with the quantitative data, it also provided insights in the current direction of pull and push factors and issues surrounding integration foreign health professionals in the workforce. This seems to provide a holistic picture in a very timely manner. If the data collected provides a good and reliable picture on recent mobility trends and its context, and if the study was conducted at an acceptable cost, we should see here a serious discussion of a methodology or tool that can complements the often slow, and also inaccurate collection of mobility data from registries and other statistical sources. This would, of course, underline the policy relevance of the article and widen its target group substantially.

Minor Essential Revisions

2. We need to have a brief discussion on recent developments. The telephone interviews were conducted in Dec 2010, January 2011. Since then, the financial and economic crisis has further escalated and the troika has imposed austerity policies on the countries. For example, Spain was until recently recruiting medical doctors from Latin America. Now, in the light of austerity policies it has declared that the previously attested workforce shortage is remedied. It would be good for the read to have a brief narrative on the current situation, even though this most likely to be rather an experts opinion.

3. More attention is needed regarding two aspects of the methodology. First, a sufficient discussion of the limitation is missing. Telephone interviews were conducted with health administration in 10 out of 18 districts all situated along the border. In my understanding this does not include the two major cities, Lisbon and Porto. Major cities, however, are usually very attractive to migrants. Maybe the figures for those cities would be even higher than for the border regions. I would like to see a brief discussion on potential bias regarding the selection of
districts. In a similar vain authors’ should briefly address implications of the low response rate for Spain.

4. You don’t cover physician movements from Portugal to Spain. Is there none or is it negligible?

5. It is surprising to me that salaries for medical doctors are better in Portugal than in Spain, please verify.

6. It is also surprising that living conditions in Portugal are so much better than in Spain, please explain.

7. We learn of a large number of unemployed medical doctors reported for 1999 and a large outflow of Spanish medical doctors, however at the same time Spain was recruiting substantial numbers of medical doctors from Latin America. Please explain.

8. I assume that Figure 1 and figure 2 represent new entrants and not stock data. If so clarify in the figure title/legend.

Discretionary Revisions
None

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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'