Reviewer's report

Title: Correlates of physician burnout across regions and specialties: A meta-analysis

Version: 2 Date: 2 July 2013

Reviewer: Michael Leiter

Reviewer's report:

Abstract
1. The opening sentence is not quite accurate as health human resources have other functions that what is noted in that sentence.
2. The second sentence refers to effects which overstates that analysis that is primarily focused on correlational research.
3. Methods: A wider range than what?
4. The presentation of the interactions in the results is hard to follow. A more systematic structure of constructing those sentences would help.
5. The conclusion: Recommendations for interventions appear to presume a causal direction from organizational and individual factors to burnout. Justification is needed.

Overall
The manuscript presents a well-executed meta-analysis. The methods are thorough and clearly explained, with rationales for each step in the process.

The manuscript has two problems regarding the conceptual approach and the writing.

First, it moves directly from observing correlations in cross-sectional studies to making recommendations for interventions. This approach has a few problems. The implicit assumption of causal direction needs justification. At the very least, the text needs some softening and caveats beyond the few words in the manuscript re this limitation.

Secondly, the text does not reflect consideration for the challenges involved in changing core aspects of physicians’ work. Some qualities of physicians’ workload or organizational role are embedded in large national systems that do not readily accommodate major shifts. Although, one may make a compelling argument for the efficacy of interventions that target multiple aspects of physicians’ work, these approaches would encounter major resistance in terms of the demands on physicians’ time and energy. In any case, the manuscript does not appear to appreciate the serious barriers to effecting meaningful change for physicians on the scale implicit in this article.

Third, the manuscript makes serious demands on the readers’ memory. There are many variables and some of them have complex interaction effects. The
tables in the manuscript are clear for presenting the statistical analyses, but do not help the reader develop a mental map of the ways in which the variables related to one another and with the aspects of burnout. Addressing this point in tables or diagram would help the reader considerably.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

none