Reviewer’s report

Title: Placement, support, and retention of health professionals: National, cross-sectional findings from medical and dental community service officers in South Africa

Version: 1
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Reviewer: Marietjie De Villiers

Reviewer’s report:

Minor essential revisions
1. The results section is quite lengthy and may lose some of the readers as a result. However, as BMC does not impose a word limit on publications and the detail results may be interesting for some people in the field this should not be a problem.

2. The authors should however look at more varied ways of reporting the data. All the data are reported in tables, in the same format, with some duplication of data in the various tables. Please look at how some of the data can be depicted in graphs, pie charts, schematically or otherwise, as that will much improve the readability and impact of the article.

3. The statement that rural placement was disproportionately more likely among unmarried, male and black practitioners exclusively in the abstract (and elsewhere when relevant) needs to be carefully contextualized. Stating it as such has the potential to provide a skewed picture of the study. There are many explanations for that, some mentioned in the text such as bursaries going mostly to black students. It could also be that more of the female doctors are married therefore the preponderance of single and male practitioners.

4. The strongest findings are indeed that service in a rural facility and good supervision and professional development during the community service year had higher intentions of continuing rural work, which is really a stunning outcome. More discussion on the latter would be interesting in terms of how one could stimulate and support supervision and professional development in the community service year.

5. Reference 31 is incomplete.

6. The last author is a Professor at the University of Cape Town, previously a Professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which is not indicated as such.

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.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have not competing interests