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 Date: 20 October 2013

Reviewer: Jane Farmer

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The article is quite long for what it says and labours the points. It needs tightening up - that is, the overall word length should be reduced to make the article more interesting and engaging to the reader - particularly in the Findings and Discussion sections.

2. Reference needs to be made to existing international literature. This is particularly so in the discussion where the authors need to align their findings with existing knowledge, saying what they have added, how their findings align with other key literature and how they move the field along - internationally. Otherwise, it is a descriptive analysis evaluating a SA scheme - which is not a bad thing, but as an international reader, I want to know what is being added that's of significance to other places.

3. I am not a statistician so I am not commenting on analyses, but the tables have oddities. E.g. Table 2 - categories do not add up to the overall number of responses. Where there are missing data this should be shown e.g. Table 1 no. responded - 685, but Table 2 responding females 396, males 278 etc. Several data in Table 2 have already been reported in Table 1. The authors should go through their tables and ensure that all response data are accounted for, and that findings are reported only once.

4. Although the authors endnote that race is reported as a demographic category, I feel there must be more appropriate ways of reporting it (?). Take the sentence on p.9 "Whites comprised the majority of the sample followed by blacks and Indians". I find this language difficult to accept. I am not sure what the politically and culturally acceptable ways are of writing this? And obviously they cannot write what was not in the questionnaire - "perhaps those stating "white" as race...? etc.

Minor Essential Revisions

Data are plural, but the term is treated as singular throughout.

Discretionary revisions
**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests