Reviewer’s report

Title: The Effects of Kenya’s Emergency Hire Nursing Program on the Delivery of Health Services: a Pilot Evaluation within Two Districts

Version: 1 Date: 7 November 2013

Reviewer: Marla Salmon

Reviewer’s report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions:

Q1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

A1. This is an interesting and potentially important manuscript that engaged me from the onset. The focus for the study is very important and has the possibility of helping to advance policy, practice, and research within and beyond Kenya. The authors have undertaken this study, despite significant challenges – and seek to answer questions that have relevance well beyond the two districts on which this study focuses. The comments made in this and the remaining sections are made in the spirit of appreciation for the work undertaken here, and in the hope that they will strengthen the manuscript in ways that enhance its clarity and impact.

With respect to the questions guiding this study - it appears that the study has the possibility of speaking to two different purposes and audiences. It appears that there are two areas of inquiry present in the article: 1) the feasibility of utilizing a small-scale, low-cost pilot approach to evaluating services through its testing in the Kenyan context; and, 2) The evaluation of services using the low-cost approach outlined in the article. It would be useful to be very clear about which question serves as the central focus for the article. The first question appears more appropriate, given the nature and outcomes of the methods, analysis and results. If the objective of this article is to pilot an approach, then speaking to this intention throughout would be useful. We need to find better ways to assess the benefit and cost of real-world interventions in affordable and timely ways to inform those directly involved in the delivery of services and deployment of resources. If it is the latter question, which reports this work as an evaluation, then it is important for the article to speak in greater depth to the methodological power, rigor, limitations, and findings, paying careful attention to the conclusions. If both questions are at play, it would be important to have greater clarity at the onset in both the description of the objectives (which might read something to the effect of: This article reports the findings of a pilot study aimed at: 1)…and, 2)….)

Q2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

A2. The mixed-methods described in the manuscript have the power to suggest the feasibility and limitations of the low cost, small scale approach utilized in this pilot study. They do not appear to have the power to speak to the question of
effectiveness of the intervention with respect to outcomes except to suggest some correlations. The limitations of the methods are very important to discuss at the onset, along with the important tradeoffs that need to be considered when working to assess real-time impact of workforce interventions. If this article were to focus more on these considerations in greater depth— the feasibility, benefit, cost, and tradeoffs of this approach as part of assessing this pilot work— the article would have greater potential impact.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

A3. The study has important methodological strengths (particularly given contextual factors) and limitations that need to be more completely explicated. Identifying which data is sound and controls now— and those suggested for the future would be very helpful. This study can and should play an important role in suggesting future approaches to evaluation, while recognizing the very understandable limitations of this pilot approach.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

A4. The methods and overall approach to this study are very interesting and have the potential to inform future work. The richness, power, and limitations of these methods are not as apparent as they might be if they were described in a bit more concise and direct fashion. As a reader, I appreciate reporting of methods that speak very directly at the onset of the methods section, with explication following. To begin with something like— “This study engaged both qualitative and quantitative methodologies aimed at XXXXXXX. Conducted over the course of XXXXXXX, the study focused on XXX” . The reader then is prepared to look more deeply at how the actual study rolled out, what the challenges, insights, and limitations were in its implementation, and what lessons were learned both methodologically and in terms of study findings.

I may have missed it, but I did not see any reference to human-subjects protections in the description of interviews. This is important and should be addressed, particularly given the focus of the study and the relationship of the interviewees to what is being studied and potential risks to their employment. Additionally, the limitations of the convenience sampling, particularly given the varying roles of the respondents would be important to address more fully, with possible recommendations about the perspectives that might be provided by category of employee, given their respective vantage points. Also, the support and permission of the employing institution were not apparent to me in the narrative— nor were the approvals and protections relating to workforce data (beyond de-identifying the data— but not by whom).

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

A5. The discussion and conclusions speaks to many important aspects of the study and the methodology. If this manuscript intends to give insights to those interested in the question of the feasibility and desirability of this type of low-cost approach to evaluation, there are some important “take aways” that can be lifted up and specifically addressed. If the conclusions are to focus only on the study
as an evaluation, the final sentence does not capture the potential richness of the lessons learned from the approach of this study. For example, the collaboration that it took to conduct this study – and the strategies that must have been used to make the study happen are important and can inform future work – would be great to hear more.

Minor Essential Revisions

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
A6. I would shorten the title to something less far reaching – perhaps something like: Kenya’s Emergency Hire Nursing Program: a Pilot Study evaluating impact in two districts. Comments relating to abstract appear in section on compulsory revisions.

7. Is the writing acceptable?
A7. Writing is generally fine - the reader would be aided in understanding the “nuts and bolts” of the study with a bit more direct description of purposes, methods, and findings. The discussion section could contain some of the things that are now included in other sections. Also, a more fulsome limitations (in fact, how about a strengths and limitations) section would be great.

Discretionary Revisions

In crediting the collaborating institutions and organizations, it might be useful to be specific about their help – this could also be done through mentioned this in the actual manuscript, particularly with respect to their roles in various parts of planning or actually undertaking the study.

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 no competing interests'