Reviewer's report

Title: Scaling up family medicine training in Gezira, Sudan; A 2 years’ in-service master program using modern information and communication technology: an observational study

Version: Date: 19 November 2013

Reviewer: Adam Ahmat

Reviewer's report:

• Major Compulsory Revisions

1. In the sections « Results», the focus was more on the description of the project and health centers targeted by the project instead of the analysis on the different components particularly the training component for which the observational study was designed.

2. The method used is more like a pre and post-test. However, more evidence from the observations must be added and analyzed to understand the pertinence and added value of the GFMP compared to the baseline. What is the intend of the article? If it is a descriptive analysis of the GFMP to show its pertinence (or progress), so this needs to be clearly established/supported by demonstrating that, for instance, students have a higher level of skill/attainment after their graduation than before, or that their achievement is greater than was predicted before the GFMP took place. Such measurements are known as baseline data.

3. When I look at the few data (figure 1 and table 5) from the self-administrative questionnaire, there is only data related to the reasons of the students for choosing family medicine (apart the characteristics of the students) and no more evidence showing that the graduates has improved their skills in family medicine and thereafter the quality of health service delivery are improved. So, at least, it is important to clarify the figure 1, is it based on the pre-test or post-test? Because there is lack of information and clarity on the self-administrative questionnaire after graduation and less on the impact on the quality of service delivery in the targeted health centers.

4. In addition, discussion and analysis should be done on the linkages of the different components of the programme in the light of the data collected.

• Minor Essential Revisions

1. In the discussion section, some limitations on the method and data should be considered. The issues of the self-reported data are not well discussed in the light of the data collected although the study mentioned it briefly. Care must be taken with any self-reported data. For instance, if the same (or similar design observation) questionnaire is self-administered before the in-service training and
after the graduation (with the same variables?), with the pre-test providing the baseline measurement, care must be taken that the observation focuses on the desired outcomes stated in GFMP vision/objective.

2. Pre and post testing should only be used for a single activity (but nothing has been said on this). The self-administrative questionnaire as pre and post-tests is much less reliable for a whole programme because the time between the two tests allows other variables to come into play. For example, the students/graduates could give themselves a confidence “score” before and after the training, or could simply report that they were more confident now (in which case the baseline measurement is their own perception before the course). Low self-esteem can sometimes mean that a student will give consistently low (or high) scores for any form of self-assessment.

Discretionary Revisions

1. What is the intend of the article?
2. The para under the “Study area” section could be more fitted in the background section

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'