Reviewer's report

Title: Personnel planning in general practices: development and testing of a skill mix analysis method

Version: 1 Date: 21 October 2013

Reviewer: James Buchan

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined? YES
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work? UP TO A POINT, YES
3. Are the data sound and well controlled? YES
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? YES
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? SEE COMMENTS BELOW
6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? YES
7. Is the writing acceptable? UP TO A POINT, BUT SEE BELOW

This is an interesting paper that is in the main well written, and it covers ground that is both new and has international implications.

However it suffers from feeling that is a partial cut of a broader report- the authors note that the literature review they used to inform the study is under review for a different publication [referred to as ref 10] , and what is provided in the paper for “HRH” therefore is lacking some context that would have been provided by a more comprehensive lit review.

The paper also suffers in places from being loosely edited- again, this is a likely result of having been culled from a bigger piece of work. A tighter edit to remove some overlap and detail would help the narrative flow.

Finally, the paper primarily reports on the process of developing and testing a skill mix “tool” but the tool is not well described- readers have to check a web link to get at all the detail- the paper should have a concise and understandable description of the prototype tool –(perhaps this could be presented as a process step figure?).

It is also not clear what has happened after the testing- is the tool now in use, being further developed, abandoned??- the reader would like to know.

There are also some typos , some errors in English grammar, and use of double “..” which would be picked up in a close copy edit.
Suggested areas for a consideration of editing in order to sharpen the text and make the key points more clearer to the reader are:

Introduction: UK piloted but has not subsequently introduced physicians assistants in any numbers- authors need to ref their statement here

It would be helpful for the international reader to have a very brief description of GP practices in Netherlands- typical size, no. of staff etc- this would help them understand the subsequent detail on the test sites.

Methods, Step 4-5- “PHP” in full

Methods Step6-7 the information here could be more clearly presented in a Table

Para under “3.Constructing the Method” heading requires a rewrite

4 “Focus Group meeting to test content validity”- End of first para requires a rewrite

Description of the skill method- first para is long and complex, would read more easily if smaller paras. Second para- this information could be presented more easily as a table or figure?

6 Test results, final para on this page is not clear and could be better linked to the Figure 1

“practice nurse chronically ill” will require some revision/ explanation/ description for international readership.

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

**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 declare that I have no competing interests