Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 2 Date: 18 February 2014

Reviewer: Jenny Gallagher

Reviewer’s report:

HRH Paper E Strassel

This paper reports on important research in this field and should be published; however, it still requires further major modifications before it is ready for publication.

There are two fundamental issues. First, if this is a development paper, it should have more details on the evidence that informed development and how the nature and content of the model changed, in relation to the testing that was undertaken. In essence, the use of the literature, expert discussions and GP surveys in building the tool is not fully explained. It is very important information in support of the content of the model. Together with tighter editing this would really contribute to the quality of the paper. In many instances this may be provided in a few key statements or sentences or perhaps a table/figure that would add weight to the paper. Second, given the issues regarding data collection outlined in Results 4 in relation to Task 4, was there shifting of patients or treatments across the skill mix spectrum for the practice or is it that the model is only considering the skill mix capacity required based on current work – rather than full skill mix modelling. If so, perhaps the authors would consider how good data can be routinely collected so that the model can be further developed in further. And consider if this is a capacity and skill-mix model.

Title

1. the question posed as a title in this version of the paper is not answered because it only goes as far as ‘informing’ personnel planning, capacity and skill mix; it does not ‘improve it’. The previous title was better but this should be considered in light of the comments above.

Methods: steps 1-3

2. Has the systematic literature review been written up elsewhere that can be referenced or can key references be quoted to provide a supportive evidence base within the paper. (Stage 1).

3. More information on the ‘characteristics to be included in skill-mix analysis model’ should be outlined (Stage 2).

Methods: steps 4-5

4. Feedback from questionnaire and focus groups – are these themes and
findings being reported elsewhere as they are relevant to informing the design.

Results 2

5. This section describes the scoring system in detail; however there are no results of the scoring presented. The authors don’t provide evidence of what elements were considered most important and which least.

Results 3 and 4

6. The four components listed here do not relate across to the model in Figure 2. Is this because of later changes? This should be modified or explained to provide a clear overview.

Results 6

7. Test results – the statement on ‘differences to national reference values’ needs to be addressed in the discussion. These practices which have participated in the research are likely to be different to national norms – this could helpfully be discussed.

8. Scores on feedback re skill mix developments need to be related to the current practice skill mix and the nature of demand in Figure 3 and the accompanying text. Perhaps one example would help to illustrate this issue.

9. The feedback that the model was ‘useful’ is insufficient. More evidence would enhance the paper.

Results 7

10. How was the model adjusted?

Figures

11. Please ensure that all axes are labelled and the figure can stand alone.

Discussions

12. It would be helpful if the authors can advise on address the data issues that need to be addressed in order to further develop the model, to consider ‘task shifting’. It would also be helpful to explore how practices may be followed up in future research.

Conclusions

13. The authors should perhaps consider being more tentative in their conclusions as this is a ‘tool’ to inform developments.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

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