Reviewer's report

Title: A scenario planning approach to human resources for health: the case of community pharmacists in Portugal

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Reviewer: Fay Bradley

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This paper describes the process of using a scenario planning approach to develop three hypothetical future scenarios for the direction of community pharmacy in Portugal and considers the drivers and facilitators to these. Overall it is well written, but to make it more applicable to an international and non-pharmacy audience some areas need more context, clarity and consistency.

Minor Essential Revisions

Background

- There needs to be more contextual information about the system of community pharmacy in Portugal – remuneration, how services are funded, ownership type, service provision (level of service provision, are there any standard services nationally or do they vary from pharmacy to pharmacy) – this would aid understanding later on when the scenarios are introduced and give the reader more of an appreciation of the potential changes described and their potential impact.

- Point about the number of pharmacy technicians working in community pharmacy decreasing by 25% - why is this and why is it relevant?

Methods

- Selection of experts – it is stated that academic and professional experience, assessed by relevant publications was the main criteria for selection. I’m not sure how professional experience is assessed through publication – is it likely that community pharmacists would have published academically? Was there some bias towards those working in academia? Table 2 outlines professional and academic experience, but were those academics also practising community pharmacists or had that experience recently. I am also assuming that all the experts were from Portugal, but this needs to be clarified.

- More detail is required about the final stage of scenario building which was conducted by the authors alone – were the audio-recordings transcribed, how were they analysed, how was the information combined with the literature review?

Results

- The critical uncertainties provided in the text do not match with those in Table 3 – there are more in the text and the headings are different and later on there is
some inconsistency when outlining which factors make up the driving forces such as ‘financial strength’ in the text and ‘financial health’ in Table 3, and ‘technological innovation’ is not listed as a critical uncertainty but as an ‘other theme debated’ in table 3.

• The acronyms ANF and OF are used, which should be written in full, with some explanation of these. Later on under ‘professional organisations role’ they are mentioned again and there is an assumption that the reader is aware of these and their particular roles and the differences between them and their standpoints etc. Doesn’t make much sense to an international, non-pharmacy audience.

Discussion

• I think there needs to be some discussion about whether the scenarios are completely hypothetical or whether they do draw on any existing models in other countries and if so what lessons have been learnt from elsewhere.

• There is little consideration of the wider pharmacy workforce in the article. What about pharmacy technicians – what role do they play in the Portuguese pharmacy team? Are there any delegation and supervision issues that need to be considered in relation to these future scenarios to free up the pharmacist’s time to deliver extended pharmaceutical services. It is mentioned in the background that the majority of Portuguese pharmacies have 2+ pharmacists; does this mean that the workforce and skill mix is already sufficient to meet these changes/challenges?

The language in Box 1 needs checking and editing

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: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests