Reviewer's report

Title: Source country perceptions, experiences and recommendations regarding health workforce migration: A case study from the Philippines

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Reviewer: Irene Glinos

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This is a good paper but more work is needed to improve clarity and structure.

Minor Essential Revisions

Methods:
1. Inconsistency: Table 1 shows three informant groups, but text only mentions two groups. Why is civil society group not mentioned?
2. In education group, only 5 organisations took part, not 6, as two informants were from same organisation.
3. Throughout text, the informant number (cf. Table 1) should be added in brackets to every interview quote.
4. Not clear how many interviews were conducted in total and how many informants were interviewed at a time. Did interviews involve participants from different groups?
5. Also, how were interviews conducted? Did the researchers put forward questions/ suggestions to participants? If so, which topics did these cover? In English?

Results:
6. This section should only present data gathered in the interviews; general knowledge, evidence from other studies, literature etc should be presented in other sections of the paper. E.g. unclear whether “Head nurses are the first to leave as they have clinical experience, which makes it easier for them to migrate, resulting in a high turnover rate of senior nursing staff” – is based on the interviews, and if so, which ones?
7. The structure is unconvincing. Authors state that four key themes were identified based on information gathered in the interviews. Yet the themes do not appear clearly in the presentation of the results. Why e.g. are the results analysed/structured according to ‘perceptions’, ‘experiences’ and ‘recommendations’? This classification appears rather random. Moreover, it is questionable whether dividing the results into ‘education focus group’ and ‘health focus group’ is of added value to the analysis or for the reader.
8. Section on health focus group seems better written that section of education group.
9. E.g. paragraph starting “The United States was the preferred...” not clear why this is presented under ‘perceptions’. Paragraph appears disconnected from rest of the text.

10. Unclear sentence: “Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) or Overseas Workers Welfare Association (OWWA) agreed that these groups should monitor labour flows.” Who agreed? Which ‘these groups’?

11. “The majority felt that nurses did not feel the presence of the...” – how can the informants express themselves on behalf of nurses? Also, make clear whom ‘the majority’ is composed of, i.e. which informants (add numbers in brackets).

12. The final Nursing Licensure Exam – is that an exam in the Philippines?

13. Unclear sentence “Pronunciation was a concern amongst the group and one informant suggested implementing orientation programs in the Philippines to assist nurses with the transition to Australia and also clarifying the requirements of Filipino nurses prior to employment.”

14. “We were like three months on the ward, and then we were fast to go to the emergency room too – so all the mistakes happen” – did the interviewees include nurses since they say ‘we’?

15. Sentence disconnected to rest of text “Mutual benefits were suggested in terms of financial aid, scholarships or faculty exchanges to encourage brain-drain circulation.” Also what is ‘brain-drain circulation’?

16. “…while State Universities have incorporated a voluntary self service where nurses serve the home country before working elsewhere”. How does this ‘self service’ work? (although information probably belongs to Discussion section unless it comes directly from an interview)

17. The concept of ‘volunteerism’ also deserves a clearer explanation somewhere in the text.

18. “So what happens is that they (volunteers) become part of the staffing, which is not supposed to be, but they don’t get paid. After three or six months, they get certificates.” Certificates of what?

Discussion:

19. “This research brings to light in a graphic manner the perceptions and experiences of Filipinos on the ground in the wake of the mass migration of Filipino nurses”. Refine this statement? Does the paper provide any evidence of this ‘mass migration of Filipino nurses’?

20. Would be more logical to say how much a Filipino nurse earns in Australia rather than in the USA.

21. “Cheng (2009) reports that 20 nursing schools failed to produce a single student who could pass the final Nursing Board examination” – is this a test in the Philippines?

22. “Rural and remote areas are severely affected by this chain of movement where a lack of experienced health workers has led to hospital closures and the
maldistribution of skills and services (Asia Pulse Pty Ltd 2011). Lorenzo (2008) reported that some hospitals have one nurse to 60 patient ratios reducing the likelihood of achieving Millennium Development Goals due to inadequate public access to good quality health care services”. does this refer to the situation in the Philippines?

23. “Working in lower paid positions further diminishes the disposable income for migrant nurses in the source country” – should this be “in the destination country”? or when returning to the source country?

24. “Education organisations reported that nurses paid a fee to hospitals in order to work as volunteers, when they essentially became part of the workforce, without pay” – are these foreign hospitals?

25. “The socio-cultural impacts of health workforce migration from developed countries is also…” – should this be ‘to’ (not from)? Clarify whether this paragraph refers to the Philippines or source countries generally.

26. Explain concept of ‘family migration’.


28. “Perceptions of working abroad have become work aspirations of young Filipinos from all over the country” – according to whom?

29. “Specified country-country agreements included the United Kingdom, USA, Bahrain and overall, the Saskatchewan model was viewed as one of the best in comparison” – specified and viewed by whom? (if by the interviewees, then move to Results section). Add a footnote to explain the Saskatchewan model?

30. Explain JPEPA.

31. “Surprisingly the global movement patterns of Filipino nurses were not discussed by informants in any of the informant groups where migration is likely to happen between several countries” – unclear sentence.

32. Name of WHO Code should be corrected.

33. Is another limitation that the study does not ask nurses themselves?

Conclusions:

34. The concept of volunteerism has to be explained and described earlier in the text. Also “an influx of inexperienced nurses were left without job opportunities in the source country in the wake of the GFC” – does this mean that these nurses returned to the Philippines as they could not find a job abroad?

35. Suggestion to spell out ‘GFC’.

36. See also Humphries at al e.g. in http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/248343/Health-Professional-Mobility-in-a-Changing-Europe.pdf?ua=1

37. “The study is timely with agreement reached on the WHO Code of Practice on International Recruitment of Health Personnel in 2010, and is consistent with Australia’s public policy commitment to promote the health of Australia’s population in terms of accessibility and equality to health whilst at the same time
nurturing foreign relations with source countries. Australia is also a signatory on the WHO Code of Practice, demonstrating Australia’s health policy commitment” – is all relevant information but seems to fit better in the Introduction to explain the purpose and relevance of the paper as well as its focus on Australia + the Philippines.

38. The third recommendation comes across as an opinion. Reformulate? Also remarkable that none of the informants recommend any retention measures, consider mentioning this.

39. Closing paragraph is excellent.

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.