Reviewer's report

Title: Impact of Hospital Mergers on Staff Job Satisfaction: A Quantitative Study

Version: 4
Date: 28 July 2014

Reviewer: Richard Pinder

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript reports on a Difference-in-Differences analysis of the effect of hospital organisation mergers in the English NHS on staff satisfaction (as measured by the NHS Staff Survey).

The topic is interesting and, quite rightly, the author points out the relative dearth of quantitative analysis in this important area. The research questions are clear. The methodology, while complex, is conceptually appropriate.

However the manuscript poses a number of challenges. Among these, the three most pertinent are:

- There are comparatively few merged organisations included in the analysis (which the author highlights in the Discussion).
- The dependent variable (composite staff satisfaction) is limited by the unknown response rate at hospital organisation level. Therefore non-response bias and response bias cannot be easily excluded (or indeed quantified).
- My approach is always to be cautious of multiple analyses, and a lot of analyses are presented in this paper. To this end, the Conclusion requires softening as the evidence does not adequately substantiate the robust assertions made.

More generally, a number of stylistic issues detract from the overall shine of the paper:

- The written English is inconsistent and requires revision throughout to ensure it is technically sound.
- In addition to the above, and in particular, several of the sentences are particularly lengthy and difficult to understand. An example of this would be Paragraph 2 of the Methodology (Study Design).
- The tone of the paper is econometric which may or may not be suitable for HRH's readership. In particular, the presentation of the tables and figures makes for difficult reading and adds layers of complexity to an already complex analysis. I would recommend reformatting of the tables at the very least. For a clinical readership the use of dummy variable names in the prose is likely to be confusing.
- The referencing requires review and correction.
- The overall manuscript is very long and I wonder whether a simplified and
streamlined version may be a more constructive contribution to the literature.

Overall, I feel that this is a very interesting area and the author should be commended for developing this approach. However in its current form, the manuscript requires substantial revision. I would label all of the above as Major Compulsory Revisions. I would be very happy to review a revised new submission.

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

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I have acted, and continue to act, as an advisor to the UK Department of Health - the government ministry responsible for hospital care in England. I am employed by the National Health Service.

I have no other competing interests.