Reviewer’s report

Title: On the frontline of primary health care: The profile of community health agents in rural Quechua communities in Peru

Version: Date: 6 February 2006

Reviewer: Ximena Salazar

Reviewer’s report:

I think all the manuscript need Major Compulsory Revisions.

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

The purpose of this article is to describe the profile of community health agents. Although the issue has not been studied in Peru, international literature on the topic is abundant. The question posed did not go into great detail.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

Research methods are not appropriately described particularly those related to the development of community agents. The authors need to provide more information about the methods they applied in their research, both quantitative and qualitative. For instance, there is no information about the variables they regarded, why and how the sample was established among the 40 rural communities? How the data analysis was conducted?

Although the use of quantitative and qualitative data is significant the article does not reflect this mixed methodology. Methodological details are not sufficiently described in order to replicate the work. The methodology section is more dedicated to describe the intervention project conducted by the authors.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

Since there is not an adequate description of research methods we can not answer this question.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Unfortunately the scarce data provided does not allow us to respond this question.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

In general, the discussion provides information on topics such as: gender, age patterns, level of education, the abandon of the program, the requirements to become a community health agent and work experience of actual agents. However, this information is not sufficient to provide a profile of community health agents. In addition we are also informed that there are 3 different types of health promoters: “curanderos”, “parteros”, and community promoters of health. Differences among these 3 groups are not clarified, neither their implications to future interventions. Finally, although the gender component has been well discussed it is absent in the final results. The article is more descriptive than analytical.
6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey has been found?

The article does not provide a profile of community health agents: it provides some characteristics that differentiate three types of community health agents.

7. Is the writing acceptable?
The writing is acceptable.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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