Reviewer’s report

Title: Improving quality of service in Tanzanian primary health care facilities: a health worker perspective

Version: 1 Date: 19 September 2005

Reviewer: Øystein Evjen Olsen

Reviewer’s report:

Comments by Dr Øystein Evjen Olsen on the paper

Improving quality of service in Tanzanian primary health care facilities: a health worker perspective

By Manongi et al.

The following issues were considered (from the HRH review guidelines):

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
7. Is the writing acceptable?

Comments:

Overall comments:

1. The paper is very relevant in addressing the human resource crisis in developing countries. The aim of the study is clearly presented. Motivation and satisfaction are key to understanding performance. Although the question is not new, the research is much needed.
2. A wider introduction to the health worker crisis should be included, although there is some reference to the global initiatives. See proposed references below.
3. On the methodology it could be useful to get a better sense of the validation between the FGD’s and the In-depth interviews. It is not clear how well the answers corresponded to each other, and the paper needs a better explanation on the triangulation / validation process. At present the results are not shown to be validated against each other.
4. Nevertheless, the paper goes far in linking motivation and satisfaction to quality, in terms of the applied methodology. As far as I can understand, the paper does not assess quality of service, but assumes motivation and satisfaction as proxies for quality of service. These issues are not clearly defined and conceptualized in the text. I think the title and the text need to be aligned with this distinction in mind. The methodology does not support statements on quality, but on motivation and satisfaction. These can then be linked to quality as proxy indicators through other literature. The
summary states it well, but several other places in the document have an unclear conceptual presentation of the two issues. See below for specific comments.

5. The paper needs to align and describe the cadre pyramid / structure both in the methodology section and when presenting results. It is not clear what the difference is for instance between an assistant medical officer and an assistant clinical officer. The term rural medical aid (paragraph 3, last sentence, introduction) is not used any more in Tanzanian HR policy (1999).

6. It would be of use to explain the use of in-depth interviews earlier in the methodology, before the sampling section.

7. The results section could benefit from a table providing a summary of the findings. These could be tabularized as presented in the text, and it could be useful to have them presented according to FGD group (nurses or clinicians) if there are any major differences.

8. The discussions section could use a section on possible bias and confounding issues.

9. There should be some newer references on the issues? Some are proposed below.

Possible additional references


Specific comments:

1. Change heading to reflect aim of study – motivation not quality
2. Introduction section:
   a. The paper could usefully include an introduction of the health sector reform and the local government reforms, and their relevance to the paper. Tanzania has several parallel reforms within the public sector with the aim of improving motivation among public sector workers.
   b. In addition it could be useful to reference the human resource crisis with a little more depth.
3. Methodology section:
   a. Explain in-depth interviews before the sampling section
   b. Was it ever considered to interview MoH officials centrally?
   c. Define cadres as mentioned earlier
   d. Better define validation methods / triangulation methods
4. Results section:
   a. Present participants by facility (dispensary / health center)
   b. The first sentence in second paragraph presents the main issue as quality, while the aim is motivation and satisfaction. Need alignment and clarification as mentioned earlier
   c. The first two sentences in the first paragraph under the heading “Training, supervision and feedback”, could be moved to the discussions section. They should preferably also be supported by references.
   d. Present findings in a summary table
   e. Better reflect validation / triangulation
5. Discussions section:
   a. First paragraph second sentence again unsubstantiated link between motivation and quality of services not supported by the methodology of the study
   b. Second sentence second paragraph correctly sites the study in Uganda on multi-tasking and efficiency, but it is questionable if it is valid to also include “as in our study”. The methodology does not support this conclusion, but it is relevant to discuss the possible, and probable, link given the feedback from the FGD’s. Efficiency and multi-tasking depends on the workload at each facility, and
in facilities with low workloads there might be a good case for multi-tasking to improve efficiency, although it might reduce motivation.

c. The presentation of the result that they prefer more formal training of experience personnel (third paragraph) could be explained by the drive for higher salaries after the training, and could be mentioned as a bias to the answers.

d. The fifth paragraph needs corrections for grammar

All in all this is a very important paper, with a highly relevant aim given the human resource crisis in Tanzania and other developing countries. This crisis is not only related to lack of personnel but also to their performance environment. The voice of the health worker is seldom presented, and useful results and recommendations are provided in this paper. The paper needs changes particularly to better reflect the aim of the study, validation of the results and clarity, as presented in detail in the comments above.

With changes I recommend the paper for publication as a valuable contribution to understanding complex human resource and management issues in developing countries.

With kind regards

Øystein Evjen Olsen

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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.