Reviewer's report

Title: Code E.4 Human Resources for Maternal Health: Multi-purpose or Specialist?

Version: 1 Date: 10 March 2008

Reviewer: Anneka Knutsson

Reviewer's report:

General comment: The article is very important as a comprehensive commentary on the issue of the Maternal Health Workforce and reasons for designating a maternal health specialist to enhance the decrease of maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity. It summarizes a number of interventions and commitments in recent years and compares the results in different settings and solutions in programming for increased quality of MNH care in an insightful and thorough way. It also provides clarification to areas that have been known to create confusion in the discussion of human resources for health. Examples of such areas are; capacity-building versus training, competence versus competencies and skills, a broader discussion on equity in care and the special difficulties relating to gender inequality for providers as well as receivers of service. This article provides reasoning theoretical evidence to practical solutions to the vast problem of human resources for maternal and newborn health with impact on MN mortality ratio. It is relatively balanced, providing also insight into competing views. References are extensive, valid and relevant.

There is however a few minor essential revisions and some discretionary revisions I think are necessary.

Minor essential revisions

1. The article is too long to maintain momentum. There are a couple of ways to shorten it and make it more to the point. Review length of sentences. Sentences are long and sometimes encompasses to many angels/parts for the reader to follow. Some parts are to some extent repeated under different headings and some parts could be incorporated under another (existing) heading. The article can also be shortened by changing some of the more descriptive writings into more succinct and condensed language.

2. p.4 last para the aim lacks an explanation on what is meant by 'in the context of MDG 5'. Long setting.

3. p. 8 para 3 relates more to obstacles for midwifery rather than why they should be invested in. Consider moving or incorporating with situational analysis.

4. p.9 all paras are important but should be more condensed.

5. p.10 para3 Part of this para seems to be still part of the situational analysis the following paras relate to the chapter on Why invest in midwives and .......p.7

6. p.13 chapter 3 revise heading and shorten it, very long sentences and detailed
description that needs editing.

7. p.14 Chapter 5 pls see comment for chapter 3 above.

8. p.14 para 4 and para 6, p.15 para 4, The 'Action' paras should consist of recommendations for action and be free from explanations as to why, as this has already been given in the paras preceding the Actions part.

9. p.17-20 condense descriptions on country advances, less paraphrasing, more distinct and to the point. Part 3 could then be integrated into part 2 which could be titled Key areas and lessons learned.

10. p.21 para 2 first sentence is 7 lines long needs editing. Para4 contains a strong statement on semi-skilled workers not being utilized could not find reference to that statement in the text. Needs citation.

11. p20-22 the 'conclusion' chapter seems to be a mixture of new angels to already discussed issues with some descriptive writing instead of a higher level of analysis of previous reasoning and evidence. There are important messages in the conclusion that somehow gets lost in too wordy settings.

Discretionary revisions

1. There are some punctuation errors, repetition of words, wrong order of words throughout the paper. Just needs another round of editing.

2. Reference 26 is misspelled should read Högberg not Högburg.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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