Reviewer's report

Title: Physician supply forecast: what are the right numbers?

Version: 1 Date: 28 May 2008

Reviewer: Catherine Joyce

Reviewer's report:

Re: 'Physician supply forecast: what are the right numbers?'
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Human Resources for Health

Reviewer's report

Major compulsory revisions
Nil

Minor essential revisions

This paper provides a useful review of different approaches to forecasting and planning for the health workforce, which is a topic that has received relatively little attention in the scholarly literature. The paper would benefit from some revision to clarify the focus and scope and certain specific points.

I have 2 main issues with the paper. The first is a lack of clarity in regard to the distinction between models or techniques designed to forecast supply, and those intended to forecast demand. These are not always clearly delineated in the paper. The authors refer to the use of both supply and demand projections as 'mixed models', but I do not think this is a useful characterisation. It does not seem to reflect an understanding that workforce planning entails estimating both supply and demand or requirements, and then comparing the two to come to conclusions about the adequacy of the workforce (despite this being noted on p11, para 3).

The second issue is the discussion of the current approach in Belgium. This is not clearly described or evaluated with respect to the conclusions drawn about preferred methods of projection and forecasting.

The authors state on page 11 (para 3) that “Examples of such baseline gap analysis are few”. I think this is true of the published, academic literature but it is a routine part of work done by governmental policy-makers and planners, even if it is not published in the public domain.

It is not clear whether Table 1 is intended to be a summary of the discussion in the text. It includes several points which are not clearly expressed and which
have not been elaborated or discussed. (for example, what do level and mode of activity refer to under supply parameters?).

The title of the paper refers to “supply” only (not demand) and asks “what are the right numbers?”. The paper does not address this question but rather, the question of what are the right methods (even though I would agree with the authors’ conclusion that there is no one right method).

There are numerous problems with English expression and grammar which need to be addressed prior to publication. Examples include:

- Lists of countries should use “and” instead of “or” before last named in list (see p 5 para 3; p9 para 3)
- Para 2 page 14 should read “However, responsive planning…”
- The meaning is unclear in: para 1 on page 6; last sentence of para 3 on page 9 “However, planners and politics…”;

The term “workforce” or “providers” or other alternative is preferable to “manpower”(used on p4 last para; p10 last para).

The authors sometimes use the terms “predict” and “prediction” when describing forecasting models (see for example para 2 page 8). I think the terms “project” and “projection” are more appropriate – models project likely future outcomes under defined assumptions rather than predict the future.

A footnote appears at the bottom of page 4 which appears to be an error.

Discretionary revisions

Nil

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

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.

Catherine Joyce
14 May 2008