Reviewer's report

Title: Health workforce attrition in the public sector in Kenya: A look at the reasons

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Reviewer: Geoff King

Reviewer's report:

This is a very well prepared report that succinctly addresses the levels and reasons for attrition in the Kenyan public health sector.

Specific points:

1. The measure used to define the attrition rate is the appropriate one for future planning and policy making - the transitional rate; the central method, which tries to average the staffing levels over the period concerned may seem more logical, but is less valuable.

2. The definition of attrition as resignations, deaths and retirements is also appropriate. Unless policy regarding retirement is changed, then there is only one of these that can actually be influenced by management action, namely resignations.

3. I feel the fact that there is little variation between total attrition at provincial hospitals, and at district hospitals and at health centres a very interesting point that many would not expect. Perhaps it is worth emphasis.

4. One concern is that the text states "we then compute an average of the attrition rates..." This could lead to misleading understanding, but may have been adequately addressed. Let me explain: If three people leave from one group of ten that gives a rate of 30%; if twenty people leave from a group of a thousand, the rate is 2%. The average of these two rates is 16% ((30%+2%)/2). However the combined attrition rate is only 2.27% (3+20)/(10+1000) - very different from 16%. Basically small sample sizes can distort understanding.

5. This may explain some of the findings regarding lab staff. The numbers are not given precisely in the text, but my calculations from information provided indicates there are approximately 150 laboratory staff. 8.1% of these died - that is around 12 people. That is not a small number of deaths, but if three people less had died, the rate would reduce to 6%. Three less people dying from a more populated cadre would not reduce the rate as much.

6. The fact that retirements are also a high proportion of laboratory staff attrition confirms that this cadre is an elderly section of the workforce and that the provision of these services needs to be addressed with some urgency.

7. The report clearly states that foreign workers are excluded. I am assuming they are excluded from both the total numbers and from the attrition numbers.
Overall the findings appear to be sound and the report very worthwhile.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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