Author's response to reviews

Title: Where do students from different disciplines want to work?

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Title: Where do students from different disciplines want to work?
Reviewer: Laurie Brown

Major compulsory revisions
1. The research question posed by this paper ‘where do students from different disciplines want to work’ is straightforward in itself but absolutely crucial in terms of the implications for future workforce planning especially in rural and remote areas where the recruitment and retention of the health workforce is so problematic. The findings of this paper will be of interest to the readership of HRH. However, the authors need to make their research questions explicit in both the abstract and paper e.g. what are the actual research questions, how exactly does these ‘add substantially to previous research’?

Main research questions and differences from previous studies are added in Abstract (methods) and background in the last paragraph.

2. HRH is an international journal. This research seems to be written for an Australian not an international audience. A little more information about Australia needs to be provided and the research findings interpreted within the Australian context.

A description of the Australian population and information placing the policy implications in the Australia context have been added on the background and discussion.

3. The data used in the research are from the ‘Careers in Rural Health Tracking Survey’. More background information needs to be provided on this survey and who the participants are. For example, the respondents are students on rural placement at the Northern Rivers University Department of Rural Health, the northern (coastal) NSW. This placement differs among disciplines, universities and year of study/stage of training.

Information about students and their placement is now given in the beginning of the results section.

4. Is there any difference in the basic characteristics of the students who participated versus who did not participate in the CRHTS (is some of this data available given they are on placement at NRUDRH)?

The CIRHTS data is not linked to other databases. However broad consistency with student placement reviews is noted in the discussion.

5. Is there some bias in these students’ rural background? i.e. does this rural placement scheme attract more students from regional and rural backgrounds because only 40% reported they came from a capital city or major urban area which is considerably lower than the national average.

The reasons for the proportion of rural students are now discussed in the results.

6. Has the placement experience influenced these students’ responses? Figure 4 indicates a very positive response rate for areas around the north coast area of NSW. The effects of rural placement are introduced in the conclusion and this needs to be explored more in the paper and especially in interpreting the findings.

The impact of rural placements is now discussed in the results section.
7. The results for medical students differ significantly from allied health students. To what extent is this a discipline versus demographic or other effect. For example, more medical students are from a foreign background or from a capital or major urban centre so perhaps it is not surprising medical students are unsure about working outside urban centres.

The demographic impact for medical students in now discussed in the results.

8. With respect to Table 1, would the authors please provide an age range as well as the average; does married include those who are partnered by not married?; and how is foreign ancestry defined?

Age ranges are provided in the text above table 1, married is noted to include defacto relationships and foreign ancestry is defined.

Discretionary revisions
9. The discussion and conclusion provides important commentary on the policy implications of the research findings. Perhaps a little more could be made of the importance of students’ background, age and timing as factors influencing locational career choices. Also I agree given that many students are unsure about working in rural/remote areas, there is an opportunity for appropriately targeted incentives to encourage these students to join the rural health workforce. The authors could indicate how consistent heir results are with the findings of other studies.

More discussion of these factors and consistency with other studies added to conclusions.

Reviewer: Adrian Dr Schoo

Major
1. In the introduction and discussion sections of the paper relevant publications have been omitted. Inclusion of student tracking studies in Western Australia, South Australian and Victoria, and Tasmania would have enhanced the paper and possibly changed its scope. Drawing on omitted papers would have enhanced the paper and validated some of the findings, for example, on students of Asian descent.

These studies have been added to the introduction and discussion.

2. The method section does not make reference to statistical tests used.

This has been added.

3. Table 2 reports average scores out of five. Given the nature of the data (non-parametric), this is not correct and should be reported as modes. Also, it would have been of interest to report on the modes of the variables used between the disciplines.

The results have been presented categorically as recommended.

4. The paper need to include a discussion section with sufficient discussion. Differences between public and private sector could be explored, particularly between disciplines (medical students do encounter private practice during their placement or may even be placed in private practice). There could have been differences between disciplines in relation to location decisions because financial factors and career options are less relevant for some disciplines.
Minor
1. Abstract. Background is rather vague. There is no purpose of the study included. More participant information could have been provided.

   This information has been added.

2. The title of the paper suggests more in depth reporting and discussion on differences between disciplines than that the paper currently offers.

   The title has been appropriately altered.

3. Table 1 would be more meaningful by reporting on rurality.

   Rural background has been added to the table.

4. The last sentence of ‘Conclusions’ is not adequately supported by the data or the discussion around the results.

   This sentence has been deleted.