Reviewer's report

Title: Contracting private sector providers for public sector health services in Jalisco, Mexico: perspectives of system actors

Version: 3 Date: 3 April 2009

Reviewer: Neeru Gupta

Reviewer's report:

Overall, the changes to the paper compared to the earlier version have greatly strengthened the readability and level of comprehension of the research findings. However I still find the main shortcoming is the lack of clarity regarding potential use of the results in other contexts, or even to support decision making in the given context itself. The authors should keep in mind that the merit of publishing the manuscript in the HRH journal as an original research paper should be based on the benefits and developments arising from the study, and not those of the contracting model.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

Specific revisions that should be considered before a decision is made on acceptance for publication:

1. The abstract is overly descriptive of the contracting program, and does not adequately detail the research or its findings. It would best be revised to follow a structured format (e.g. background, methods, results, conclusions).

2. The introductory section needs to be more explicit early on in terms of the potential uses of the research results. (In other words, why should the reader care to read this study?)

3. The background should help orient readers understand how the program could be applicable in their own contexts, if the paper is to have widespread appeal. For example, the text describing Table 2 simply states "The budget increased by nearly 100%... All financial resources for this program come from state funds." It would be useful if the authors could discuss, for example, what were the implications of such a large budget increase, were savings realized compared to alternative policy options, and what were the lessons learnt that could be shared with other countries?

4. Some statements need much better clarification and backing by evidence. In particular, the statement "It seems that independent medical practice, for decades the prototype of medical practice in Mexico, is no longer a primary option in Jalisco" (near Table 5) should be reviewed. It is supported by neither the paper's background material (which focuses on the public health system), nor the research results (limited to a small self-selected sample of contracted physicians, and therefore excludes all those who actually do continue to work in
independent practice for their perspectives).

5. The conclusion needs to be more explicit in terms of how the research results presented here brought forward new insights for improving the effectiveness of the contracting program.

- Minor Essential Revisions

1. There is no explicit reference to Table 1 in the text.

2. Probably Table 2 could be dropped (in favour of better contextual description of the means of financing and implications of the budget increase, as per point 3 above).

3. In the Methods section, the term "three categories of providers" needs to be explicitly defined in the fourth paragraph, where the label is first mentioned.

4. The method for tallying the responses included in Table 4 should be better detailed. For example, were these the most often cited spontaneous responses in the survey, or was any mention of a given reason enough to warrant inclusion in the table? Some sort of ranking would be useful.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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.