Author's response to reviews

Title: Health workforce responses to global health initiatives funding: a comparison of Malawi and Zambia

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Reviewer's reports – James Buchan and Johanna Hanefeld

Note: Edits to the text have been highlighted apart from where the edits were very minor.

Title: Health workforce responses to global health initiatives funding: Malawi and Zambia

Version: 2 Date: 26 April 2010

Reviewer: James Buchan

Reviewer's report:

A highly relevant and well written paper- subject to having addressed the points that were made in the previous review, the additional requirements are "Minor Essential Revisions":

1. Abstract- should be "2006/7" date not "2006" in Methods paragraph
   
   2007 has been added (page 2).

2. Organisation and labelling on the Figures requires to be completed- titles etc.
   
   Titles have been added to Figures 1 - 3. Numbers of facilities have also been added to the legends.

3. page 8, second paragraph requires some re writing for clarity
   
   This has now been re-written (page 16 of current draft) to provide further clarity.

4. page 8 third paragraph requires clarification of what size of population the 1.8 and 1.7 etc staff are a ratio of .......
   
   This is per 10,000 people. Text has been amended (now page 18)

5. page 11 typo- second line should be Assistant
   
   This now reads HSAs (now page 19).

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'
Reviewer's report

Title: Health workforce responses to global health initiatives funding: Malawi and Zambia

Version: 2 Date: 11 May 2010

Reviewer: Johanna Hanefeld

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

This is an excellent paper, drawing on vast amount of data from two countries, which adds new (urgently needed) knowledge on the effects of GHIs on HRH at facility level.

Two specific comments for the authors to consider:

1. The authors have clearly collected and analysed a vast amount of very relevant data, on the basis of which a number of interesting, nuanced findings emerge. However, in the findings section of paper the presentation of the data is such that the ‘story’ or findings almost get lost a bit in the detail of data presented. This nuance is great, it makes the paper so rich, but I was wondering if some ‘signposting’ through subheadings breaking up the section would make the findings appear in a more compelling way.

   One suggestion would be to structure the findings section under the themes identified and used for the data analysis as set out in the methods section: ‘categories, numbers, distribution and workload, related to HIV service scale-up.’

   This is just one suggestion, I am certain that the authors will have a better feel for how to best structure the data. Just as more thematic sub-headings rather than just ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ data may make it easier to follow the findings.

   The findings are now grouped under the following sub-headings
   - Trends in scale-up of services
     - Numbers and categories of health workers
       o Malawi
       o Zambia
     - HIV and non-HIV workload
       o Malawi
       o Zambia

   The previous separation of qualitative findings has been subsumed into the appropriate sub-headings above.

2. A real strength of this paper is the comparison of Malawi and Zambia, as it shows the different impact of one vs more GHIs. I was wondering if just one additional sentence providing this as a clear rationale upfront in the background
The rationale for comparing Malawi and Zambia is set out on page 5 and is summarised as follows:

- Both countries receive large funds from GHIs – Zambia from both PEPFAR and the Global Fund and Malawi from just the Global Fund. The proposition is that it may be easier to roll out a coordinated national human resource strategy where only one GHI exists.
- ART coverage is close to 50% in both countries and PMTCT services have been rolled out to all districts in both countries.

For example, the sampling is clearly very different, while the authors provide a clear rationale for sampling in each country it may leave a reader wondering why the comparison or different sampling for comparison, I feel one sentence would suffice to provide an even clearer rationale for the sampling but especially for the comparison of the two countries.

Common research objectives and methods existed in Malawi and Zambia used standardised tools and indicators. However, the research questions were specific to each country and this necessitated different sample strategies. This has now been explained (page 16).

**Minor Essential Revisions**

1. The second paragraph of the background sounds a bit like a ‘plug’ for GHIN, it be may be advisable to maybe revise and provide the website address in a footnote at least?

   *We have included a link to the GHIN website in the text (page 4), as we are aware that it is not permitted for us to include footnotes. If the editors would rather we shorten or exclude the paragraph, or the URL, we have no problem in doing so.*

2. Figure 2 and Figure 3: it would be clearer to include in the legend of the figures or in title of each Figure what ratio is referred to here.

   *‘Per clinical staff member’ has been included in the titles of Figures 2 and 3.*

**Discretionary Revisions**

1. The authors, when talking about health worker burn out in Zambia, may find it helpful to reference the recent paper by Kruse et al on the subject.

   Burnout and use of HIV services among health care workers in Lusaka District, Zambia: a cross-sectional study. Gina R Kruse,1,2 Bushimbwa Tambatamba Chapula,3 Scott Ikeda,1,4 Mavis Nkhoma,1 Nicole Quiterio,1,5 Debra Pankratz,1 Kaluba Mataka,1 Benjamin H Chi,1,6 Virginia Bond,7,8 and Stewart E Reid1,9
2. Further to the comment above on including a rationale for the comparison, I was wondering if it may be easiest to amend the title slightly, in order for this to include something like ‘a comparison of Zambia and Malawi’

*The title of the paper has been changed.*

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
No, but I am currently working as a consultant to GHIN.