Author's response to reviews

Title: Challenges in physician supply planning: the case study of Belgium

Authors:

Sabine Stordeur (sabine.stordeur@kce.fgov.be)
Christian Léonard (christian.leonard@kce.fgov.be)

Version: 3 Date: 21 May 2010

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editors,

First of all, we would like to thank the first reviewer to address additional comments on our manuscript, in order to improve its structure and its coherence.

We are pleased to submit today a second revision of our paper for publication in Human Resources for Health. Please find herewith a Revisions Note in which we indicate how we addressed each of the referee’s comments. Our answers are in italic font. Moreover, we highlighted changes made when revising the manuscript.

We are confident that in its current format our paper will trigger the interest of many readers of Human Resources for Health.

Best regards,

Sabine Stordeur, RN, MA, PhD
Christian Leonard, Economist

KCE- Doorbuilding
Boulevard du Botanique 55
1000 Brussels
Belgium
Revisions Note

Referee #1:

1. The introduction section states more or less explicitly that the article will not be about modeling and data issues but on implementation issues. But some of the paragraphs in the case description and the discussion section still are on modeling and data issues.

*We fully agree with this remark. Consequently, we have adapted the text in order to focus on implementation issues. The problems raised in using a supply-based model as the proposed alternatives (e.g. demand based model) were deleted throughout the text.*

2. The information on “medical training in Belgium” should not be part of the “Case study”, because it is not mentioned as part of the objective to describe key challenges. It should be part of the introduction.

*This part was adequately replaced in the introduction section, just before the enumeration of the paper’s objectives*

3. Maybe it would be good to restructure the article according to the following scheme. Mention five key challenges in the introduction section: (1) setting the right numbers, (2) fulfilling the quotas, (3) specialty imbalances, (4) geographical imbalances and (5) international mobility. State that the objectives are (a) to identify the specific challenges for each of these key challenges, (b) to describe the solutions used in Belgium, (c) the solutions used in other countries and (d) the lessons to be learned.

*The structure of the article was modified:*

1) all key challenges were systematically enumerated in the introduction;

2) the second challenge, namely ‘fulfilling the quota’ was integrated in ‘setting the right numbers’, since it concerns the implementation of federal decisions on ‘numbers’ at a regional level.

3) our objectives were clearly stated: “Our objective is two-fold. First, four key challenges in health workforce planning in Belgium will be developed: 1) setting the right numbers, 2) tackling specialty imbalances, 3) dealing with geographical imbalances and 4) apprehending international mobility. Second, for each key challenge, we will identify solutions used in Belgium as lessons drawn from other countries to formulate recommendations for an effective health workforce planning.”

4. Add an abstract.
An abstract is proposed (but it was already proposed with the original version as the revised version), slightly adapted according to modifications introduced in the main text (no reference to forecasting models).

5. The five key challenges could be the headings in the results or case description section. Under each heading there could be four subheadings: (a) the specific challenges for each heading, (b) the solutions used in Belgium, (c) the solutions used in other countries and (d) the lessons to be learned.

This structure was adopted in the original version of the paper that was considered as inadequately structured, without clear delineation between Belgian situation and foreign experiences. For this reason, the first revised version was fundamentally restructured: 1) Belgian case study, 2) foreign experiences and lessons drawn from the comparison, 3) discussion and recommendations. The positive remarks obtained (the article gained in coherence), lead us to prefer keeping the structure adopted in the revised manuscript.

6. Limit the discussion and conclusion section to a short summary of the lessons to be learned.

Some redundant figures and facts were deleted in the discussion to shorten this part before the recommendations

7. The article has to be checked on spelling. For the first three pages, my suggestions are:

- “highlighted [6]” instead of “highlighted it [6]”
- “from international benchmarking” instead of “from an international benchmarking”
- “gradually smooth” instead of “smooth gradually”
- “The latter proportion” instead of “This last proportion”
- “on the workforce” instead of “on the manpower workforce”
- “GPs were not based” instead of “GPs will not more be based”
- “specialists has to be trained” instead of “specialists have to be trained”

All spelling errors were checked and corrected