Reviewer’s report

Title: Human resources management interventions to improve health workers' performance in Low and Middle Income countries: a realist review

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Human resource management interventions to improve the performance of health workers is a critical issue for policy-makers, managers and health systems researchers. So this paper fits well with the interests of this journal.

The main question for the reader will be: 'what does this review add that other excellent reviews such as those by Rowe et al. have not already covered?'. The authors state that this is a 'realist review' that aims to answer 'what is it about this program that works for whom in what circumstances'. I agree with the authors that 'thick' descriptions of successful interventions are rare in this field and a systematic examination of 'success factors' would be very useful.

Unfortunately i do not believe that the results presented in this paper do justice to the stated aim. I was hoping to see that the authors had clearly identified programmes that have been successful and then to collect further information in order to identify what were possible reasons to explain this success. Conversely a comparison between successful and unsuccessful interventions would also be revealing. Overall it would be very useful to be presented with a synthesis of the key contextual and intervention factors that could guide policy makers and managers in designing their HRM interventions.

We are presented with a summary of some of the interventions that have been found to be successful but too little detail with regards to the issues raised above. A more detailed description of context of the interventions is missing. We are presented instead with enticing statements such as 'Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) training was less effective in Brazil and Uganda than in Tanzania' but little extra description of the contextual factors that explain such differences. The findings that supervision, training or strong management systems are important for success are well established in the literature. This analysis could provide us with some greater insights as to which of these more important or under what circumstances do certain types of interventions work better? What are the ingredients/contexts that make QI work?

Presently these questions are left unanswered.

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.