Reviewer's report

Title: How to characterize the public health workforce based on essential public health operations? Environmental public health workers in the Netherlands as an example

Version: 3 Date: 1 March 2015

Reviewer: Silvio SB Brusaferro

Reviewer's report:

The study introduces an interesting methodology to estimate Public Health workforce and its capacity in European countries. This topic although is really relevant, has not been explored very much and, at the moment, we are lacking standardized methodologies. This study proposes a contribution to this issue. The study is worthwhile to be published but it needs some integrations before publication.

1. Abstract: data about the sample size and the response rate are misleading since the authors did not reach a 70% response rate from 472 public health workers.

2. Methods:
   a. Pag. 7, line 67: it should be helpful to mention (as reference) the existing policy documents (better if they have an English version)
   b. Pag 7. Line 71 and table 1: it is necessary to explain the definition of EPHO n.8 for environmental public health as quality assurance;
   c. Pag 7: it would be useful to readers to read some of the examples proposed as daily environmental public health practice.

3. Results:
   a. Feasibility section: it is not clear how the numbers reported in the 2nd paragraph (lines from 186 to 190) are linked to the previous paragraph.
   b. In many parts of the results physicians are cited but the number (n. 28 respondents) is mentioned only in the section validity check. This professional category should be better specified in the section "composition of the environmental public health workforce" and in table 3.
   c. Pag 14 lines from 246 to 249: adopted definitions are not corresponding to those reported in table 1.
   d. Pag. 14 lines 250 to 252: this statement is interesting but no data support it.

4. Tables and figures
   a. Table 1: it should be completed with foot notes explaining: references for EPHO and the way EPHOS for environmental public health have been developed.
b. Table 3: columns definition should be changed since at the moment they are confusing; the total number of the respondent should be mentioned.

b. Figure 1: it is not really of immediate reading. It could be helpful to propose a table including also the numbers of FTE per each EPHO.

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.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests