Reviewer's report

Title: A Qualitative Study of Factors Influencing Unavailability of Doctors and Nurses at Rural Healthcare Facilities in Bangladesh

Version: 2 Date: 29 December 2014

Reviewer: Stephen Reid

Reviewer's report:

Abstract

The study addresses an issue of importance in many countries, but the approach to the difficulty in recruitment and retention of professional staff in rural areas is not new or original.

The abstract is clear and succinct.

Introduction

The summary of the context of rural-urban imbalances in the world and in Bangladesh is appropriate. Of interest is the information that “In Bangladesh, the MoHFW has put in place strategies to enhance motivation and retention of health workers beginning in 2008. These strategies aim to develop packages of financial incentives for rural areas.”

Major Compulsory Revision: Some data should be presented in the introduction to illustrate the extent to which these strategies have succeeded or failed. How do we know that motivation and retention of health workers has not improved over the 5 years since 2008? Have any evaluations been carried out? Which strategies have shown some success, and which ones have clearly failed? Before going on to find out why they have failed, the introduction should establish clearly that the strategies have in fact failed, otherwise the study is based on assumptions.

Methodology

The study design is appropriate, and qualitative methods suit the approach. However the sampling strategy was difficult to justify – the study interviewed those who were present in rural posts about why others had left them.

Major Compulsory Revision: The sampling needs to be more clearly set out. What was the total study population of doctors and nurses and managers in posts, from which the respondents were selected? What proportion of the total population was interviewed, and how were they selected? If it was not a random sample, what method was used to select them and why? The two national policymakers were purposively selected, which is appropriate because of the small numbers of individuals in these positions, but it is not clear how the doctors and nurses and managers were selected or excluded.
Results

Major Compulsory Revision: The number of individuals who refused to be interviewed should be given. In the light of the political upheavals at the time of data collection, could the results have been influenced by the perception of the interviewer or researcher as siding with one political faction or another? In what way might this have biased the results?

The results are well presented with appropriate verbatim quotations, and are interesting.

Minor Essential Revision: Line 412: “The civil surgeon” needs some explanation

Discussion

Major Compulsory Revision: The results should be discussed relative to the 2010 WHO Recommendations (reference 5) which are a good starting point for this study. In what ways do these findings from Bangladesh challenge or endorse the recommendations? Such a discussion would elevate the manuscript to be of interest to an international audience, rather than a parochial one.

The limitations of the study are clearly set out.

Conclusion

The conclusion is weak, and could be strengthened by a more rigorous approach to the discussion.

Minor Essential Revision: Line 629: “pursuing”

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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