Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Julia Witt

Reviewer's report:

This article reports on the qualitative findings of interviews with healthcare providers (8 doctors, 7 nurses) and facility managers (4) in a rural region, as well as 2 policy-makers at the national level, in Bangladesh. The focus of the interviews is recruitment and retention in rural areas, and the questions and findings relate to these. The results are organized thematically, with references to quotes from the interviews to elucidate the issues that the interviewees are facing.

Major compulsory revisions:

There is little information about who is included in the sample (and who is not). This is important to gauge the sample’s representativeness – are these issues likely as severe in other districts? And what about for the other health centres within that same district?

Lines 273 – 280 address doctor’s rural roots and their desire to return to their home area to practice there. The female specialist appears to be from that area. What about the other participants? Are they mostly returning home? This type of information is important to contextualize the findings since rural origins are very important to willingness to work in a rural area. Other information, such as whether the participants have children, are young, or grew up in a city (if available) would be useful to know as well, since these characteristics affect preferences for working in rural regions.

The paper is well organized by themes, but the authors never mention how many in the sample agree or disagree with the concerns raised in each of the themes. For example, line 368 “Accommodation”: all report having access to electricity, but some report having to rent homes because of the inadequacy of what is provided. How many are using the provided quarters then? The style of reporting the data is very anecdotal.

Generally, the authors report very interesting and important findings. These are well organized under specific themes that are clearly important to recruitment and retention. However, discussions are largely backed up by one or two quotes from the interviews, with no indication of whether all respondents raised the same point, or experienced the same problem. It would be very helpful to have these numbers reported to provide an indication of the severity of the problem,
and whether all providers (male/female, young/old, etc.) have similar experiences.

Minor essential revisions:

It is difficult to think about these issues without the appropriate context – what is the average salary of a specialist in Bangladesh? How much more can specialists in the city make with private practice? How many healthcare workers are employed in the particular district that is being studied here? There is lots of good information in the background section, but numbers specific to the themes would be helpful.

Discretionary revisions:

The title is a bit misleading – “unavailability” is not really what is addressed here.

The writing is acceptable.

**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.