Author's response to reviews

Title: Handling healthcare workforce planning with care: where do we stand?

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear HRH Editorial Board,

We have received Dr. Kaspar Wyss’s report with respect to the latest changes to the manuscript, for which we are deeply thankful. From his response, we believe his main objections are not related to the lack of scientific quality or to any epistemological inconsistency found in the manuscript, but to aesthetic and formal aspects regarding how the document is structured. Since the manuscript has already been peer-reviewed by five other parties with excellent academic qualifications (suggested by the HRH Editorial board), and is in fact the iterative result of such demanding and laborious reviewing process, we take the proposals of Dr. Kaspar Wyss as suggestions to an alternative version of the current manuscript, and not as impediments to its publication in its current state. Of course, it is up to the editorial board to decide and act accordingly. Nevertheless, we have answered Dr. Kaspar Wyss’ concerns in more detail, hoping we will come to terms.

Kind regards,

The authors
Reviewer 3 – Dr. Kaspar Wyss

We would like to thank Dr Kaspar Wyss remarkable efforts in making sure this manuscript abides by a strict and rigorous scientific process which has contributed significantly to its quality. Having reached this point, and based on Dr Kaspar Wyss’ response to the latest version of the manuscript, we believe we have addressed all concerns regarding the content and the scientific contribution of this paper. Notwithstanding, some concerns seem to remain regarding the form of the document, which we try to cover next.

Dr. Kaspar Wyss chief concern is related to the structure of the manuscript. The main point is that it should be split in two different manuscripts as it addresses two distinct topics. We think that although such change could be done, the two resulting papers would loose both purpose and appeal, which is to provide a starting point to researchers and policy-makers alike to get started in HRH planning. The historical perspective provided on the evolution of the field is in fact crucial to any analyst or policy-maker, showing that in such a human-intensive field these methodologies cannot be detached from the idiosyncrasies of the workforce, and no mathematical model can be accurate without capturing such effects. An article focusing only on the historical perspective would lack the contribution in terms of models and tools, and an article containing only models and tools would fail to pay tribute to the importance of the human factor. Furthermore, the current manuscript has already been peer-reviewed by five other parties with excellent academic qualifications (suggested by the HRH Editorial board), and is in fact the iterative result of such demanding and laborious reviewing process. For instance, having a separate Scope section, which Dr. Kaspar Wyss suggested merging with the Introduction, was by request of a previous reviewer.

The second point raised by Dr. Kaspar Wyss is related to the inner structure of the manuscript. Dr Kaspar Wyss suggests that a structure containing an introduction followed by methods, results and discussion should be used instead, omitting the background section. We believe such structure would be more adequate for reporting a systematic review of the literature, which is not the case. In this particular case, such structure would fail to purport the goal of the paper: a review of the literature that follows the chronological and historical evolution of the field. We agree with Dr Kaspar Wyss that the Background section contains content that is (part of) the result of the methodological process. Notwithstanding, we have decided to include it as a separate section as we believe it helps the reader immensely,
especially the one not acquainted with the field. Narrowing the gap with analysts and policy-makers is also making sure our academic production is easily accessibly, which is one of the goals of the journal Human Resources for Health. Moreover, we have not merged the Background section with the Introduction, as suggested by Dr. Kaspar Wyss, because it can be safely skipped by the experienced reader. Also, the structure followed is very common in the Economics, Health Economics and Health Policy literature, despite not being standard in other research fields.

Finally, we would like to stress that although the paper would benefit in some points from the changes proposed by Dr Kaspar Wyss, it would loose one of its main goals: to be a starting point and become a one-stop reference in current HRH planning.