Reviewer's report

Title: Human Resources for Primary Health Care in Africa: Progress or Stagnation?

Version: 3
Date: 21 November 2014

Reviewer: Amani Siyam

Reviewer's report:

1. Page 2 in the Abstract Background....first sentence - WHO recommends that countries should have at least 2.3....to achieve key public health goals. This statement is misleading. WHO in WHR 2006 stated that, on average, countries with fewer than 2.3 health care professionals (counting only doctors, nurses and midwives) per 1000 population failed to achieve an 80% coverage rate for deliveries by skilled birth attendants. It is not a recommendation rather a threshold below which achievement is unlikely.

2. In the Introduction page 3, 3rd paragraph. The number of health workers needed was calculated by fitting a line.... Reviewer suggests to drop this sentence as it is wrong.

3. In the Results, page 4, 2nd paragraph...The WHO Global Observatory stops at 2005.... Reviewer: This statement is misleading, the WHO GHO does not stop at any one year, it a global monitoring system updated annually subject to the availability of published official national reports (through MoH or Registries, or population-based data (surveys, census)). Suggest to modify to state that through GHO, the latest available data is 2005 Uganda, ....etc

4. In the Results section, the authors fail to present their ideas in a sequence. Reviewer proposed to insert section sub-headings: Training & Education, Staffing levels and financing....etc.

5. Authors were only able to show data on health workers in primary care in the case of Mali and hence it is unacceptable to discuss HRH for Primary Health Care using national densities or training outputs. See page 7 paragraph 3. Reviewer proposes to re-draft the manuscript with a clearer focus on production and staffing financing.

6. The Policy implications section appears quite prescriptive and disjoint from the findings of the research work done.

7. The references list needs revision - references 29 and 30 do not appear in the main text.

8. In Table 1 referenced in the Results section, page 4, the authors use the maternal mortality Ratio estimates of 1990-2008 (published in 2010) which have
now been revised and updated in methodology to WHO’s recent work published in 2014. Reviewer strongly recommend the use of the updated and improved estimates that can be found on
e.g Botswana the MMR is 170 (110,280) compared to paper estimates of (190,590)

9. Figure 5 - referenced on page 5 paragraph 4 although the authors are trying to make a point about theoretical numbers of posts available versus affordable ones, the point to make here is that target positions are often based on theoretical numbers that are not needs-based which results in unrealistic numbers and an exaggerated vacancy rate - also the reference to Capacity Plus 2009 has to be more exact if these are nationally-representative numbers.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

None