Reviewer’s report

Title: The evolution of the National Licensing System of Health Care Professionals: A qualitative descriptive case study in Laos

Version: 0 Date: 06 Sep 2016

Reviewer: Fiona Pacey

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for your article. It is interesting to read the case study of developments in Laos, and the similarities and differences in relation to health practitioner regulation with other countries.

It can be a challenge to create a sense of life in a paper that draws primarily on documentary materials. You mention in your methods that you undertook interviews, but the documentary materials feel like they overshadow the interviews and your findings.

The section I enjoyed most is in 1 - the Key Events as it has a sense of movement. The discussion section would be enhanced by aiming to create a similar sense of movement - whether of events, or perhaps by focusing more specifically on the actions that different policy actors (e.g. Ministry of Health and the Healthcare profession council) are or need to pursue.

I was also curious as to whether there were organised groups of health professionals or perhaps health educators (e.g. Colleges and Universities) involved?

The paragraph beginning on Line 41 on page 4 was a helpful overview of some background information. However, given the later reference in the paper to private hospitals it would also be helpful to include a description of the relative activities or % of health care delivery in Laos that is delivered in this way. Perhaps also to the multi-ethnic communities within Laos (as referred to in the conclusion).

The sentence beginning on Line 50 with However - is a little confusing, and you may wish to consider a stronger statement beginning with "Laos lacks the mechanisms......, and then include the elements you have listed.

Page 5, Line 5 - you may wish to simplify this line be replaced 'ascertaining whether' with 'determining if'

Table 1 is very detailed, and the journal would need to advise on its suitability. It would be easier to read in a web page than the smaller size of a printed journal.

Page 10, Line 6 - there is mention of an 'observation' about the overlap of legal instruments - is this something that has a specific reference/source or drawn from your interviews?
Page 7, Line 49 - you may wish to simplify by removing "in particular, that for nurse was established as" and add a comma to the previous sentence and add' Including a "National

Page 8, Line 14 - I was not clear whether newly recruited civil servants would be all trained health practitioners, or those of certain groups (e.g. medical practitioners and nurses), or a small number who had been recruited as civil servants. It would be appreciated if this could be clarified as this section is especially interesting.

Page 10, Line 37 - I think "sort of" may have been text from a previous version as it is not required for this sentence to be clear.

Page 11 - some of the content you mention in the conclusion - i.e Overseas medical graduates, national examination for ethnic minorities and level of expertise within the same profession' is likewise interesting, and I did wonder if this may be better positioned in the discussion to highlight that there are challenges that are specific to many other countries and others which are perhaps less universal. e.g specific arrangements for ethnic minorities.

I could not locate a mention of Figure 3 in the text of the article, and the categorizations would require some additional explanation.

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Quality of written English
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