Reviewer's report

Title: Analysis of strategies to attract and retain rural health workers in Cambodia, China and Vietnam and context influencing their outcomes

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Reviewer: Belinda O'Sullivan

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this paper which is valuable but I think will be stronger and more accessible to a wide global readership if it is re-fashioned in a different format (as a policy narrative) and condensed around a clear aim.

Title: I suggest a revision in line with the aim (suggested below) and the actual method used and material presented to "A narrative review of human resource strategies and broader policy context for rural health workers in three south east Asian countries, at different levels of development"

Abstract - Aim:

The aim needs revision for clarity. this is extra important in a conceptual paper like this one, as a lot of material presented is jumping around at the moment making it hard to read. To keep this paper really focused I suggest the following aim

"The aim is to describe the specific strategies and broader policy context supporting rural health workforce development in three south east Asian countries that are at different levels of development".

Abstract - Method:

I suggest you revise this paper given the aim and the presented material. I suggest "This is a policy narrative based on a review of available material sourced from key informants, and key informant interviews about local context, strategies and their outcomes"

The reason I recommend this, is that this is not a case study, nor a qualitative study, but a policy analysis, and policy review, which is why I think this method fits with the material presented, and can encompass key informant interviews to strengthen the identification of material and provide stakeholder perspectives.
Abstract - Results:

I suggest re-write the results to summarise the strategies used and differences between the countries and then present the overview of the policy context and how that compares by country. So re-write this around the revised aim.

Abstract - Conclusion:

The conclusion can only conclude on what was presented in the abstract results, so limit this down to broad themes noted, specifically referring back to reporting on the aim.

Please note: avoid the term "context" and "implications" and use specific terms instead, wherever possible, so it is really clear exactly what you are talking about, given this is a conceptually challenging piece of work.

Main article - Background:

Suggest shift the last para to first, as that would provide more immediate context and aim of this paper.

p5. line 11 make this paragraph 1 and revise the aim as suggested above

p.4 line 7 make this paragraph 2 etc.

Main article - Methods:

I suggest to write this method as a policy narrative, based on selected south-pacific countries with different socioeconomic status, and within them, key informants, via purposive sampling, representing a range of stakeholders to promote wider understanding of the scope of strategies and broader policy context of the country.

Remove headings like "sample strategy" and "data collection". A policy narrative is deliberately broad, which fits with what you've done here. remove much of "data analysis" not needed - just that the interviews were done, an hour long, recorded and thematically coded to inform the aim.

Main article
Results

Suggest present in two equal parts: the first "human resource strategies employed" and the second "broader country policy context influencing rural health workers"
Table 2 - not needed, the text provides more information so there are a few conflicts, suggest take it out.

Please be clear where policies targeted rural regions - often the regions are stated but the international reader doesn't know if they are "rural".

p8 line 50 delete 'rural', it is there twice.

p.9 line 6 and line 22, are these "rural" provinces and counties?

p.9 line 27 what is drug mark up - suggest delete this sentence.

p.9 line 36 what is twinning - this is not a known term

p10. line 36 do you mean "rural health workforce" of all workforce.

p.10 line 50 unclear "As for regulation..."

p11 line 4 to line 14 delete paragraph "contextual factors" this isn't needed

Suggest reduce the words in the broader policy context around the key themes, socio-economic, hospital or community health care investment, private and public investment.

p.12 line 29 I don't understand decentralization as the way you have referred to it, as investment in hospitals. So turn the sentence into a discussion of devolved investment in primary care, not hospitals

p.13 line 43 retain "rural" health workers

avoid terms like 'brain drain" which are not evidence based in this paper.

Main paper - Discussion:

Suggest re-work this. This section should bring together the policy implications from the material presented (the two sections suggested) in the results (the strategies and then the broader policy context) rather than being focused on introducing new evidence from overseas.

Please focus your discussion on what can other countries learn from what you have presented - about countries at different socioeconomic levels? Since the academic material you present is only discussing and observing, not testing the outcomes of the strategies or the policies, the implications and conclusions should only "suggest" what should be the right balance of human resource strategies in different types of countries and what other broader policy influences should be considered (socio-economic development, balance of public and private sector, acute and community services etc.). So avoid making inferences that things are definitely linked in a causative way.
Then this section needs to perhaps make a statement about whether the strategies to get more rural workers are piecemeal or still worth it, within the effects of the broader policy context of the country to add true value to the aim that it was set up for.

Once again I congratulate you on your efforts with this paper and encourage you to re-package this for the global readership of rural health workforce capacity building, with the potential to inform the range and scope of different strategies needed and the country policy landscape that we need to also be aware of.

I strongly encourage you to resubmit this important work.

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Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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