Reviewer's report

Title: ‘Everything was just getting worse and worse’: deteriorating job quality as a driver of doctor emigration from Ireland

Version: 0 Date: 09 Aug 2019

Reviewer: Maria Mathews

Reviewer's report:

Using qualitative interviews with ex-pats in Australia, this study looks and the work conditions of physicians in Ireland and looks at physicians decisions to leave the country.

The use of theory (Hirschman's loyalty-voice-exit) is a strength of the paper and is a novel approach to understanding physician retention and departure (the latter, the focus of the article).

The introduction presents two contextual issues: that emigration increased after 2008 and that short-term emigration for post-graduate training was seen as beneficial. I expected to see these reflected in the inclusion criteria and/or analysis - that is the sample is limited to those who left after 2008 (or a comparison made between pre and post 2008 emigrants) and that the sample is limited to those who are completing post-graduate training (i.e. residency or fellowship).

How was the ultimate number of interviews determined (saturation or some other parameter?).

While interview questions are broadly described, they do not seem to be aligned with the results presented in the text. If the article focuses on a subset of the data or one in a series of articles using the dataset, it would be helpful to say so.

More information on the development of the coding and analysis of the interview transcripts would be helpful - from the citation of literature in the methods section, it appears that some sort of thematic analysis was done. But, it seems that finding were driven by the literature, not the data. What steps were taken to enhance the quality of the analysis?

In the results, only snippets of quotations are given and I'm left with the impression that I may not have the full understanding of what the respondent is saying. In part, this is because the
sample mixes trainees with "full-fledged" physicians. For example, 'in long hours and fast pace'-some of the comments reflect the nature of post-graduate training, rather than the state of the health care system and working conditions as a whole. I’m not suggesting that positive workplaces are not important for trainees - but the policy levers and implications are different. Similarly, the participants' status has substantial impact on "voice". The vulnerability of a trainee is different than the vulnerability of non-trainee physicians - and the policy levers for addressing these issues are different.

The role of gender (though potentially very important) is completely un-explored in the article.

Overall, I think this article could offer some valuable insights into the working conditions of physician trainees, but at present some tweaks are needed to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the reliability of the analysis, and the credibility of the conclusions. Given the richness of the data set, I think these issues can be addressed by the authors.

**Level of interest**
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

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

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests**
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?
5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal