

Author's response to reviews

Title: Professional training for community health care and retention in rural medical practice in Mali : a participatory action research

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Author's response to reviews: see over

Dear editor,

We wish to thank the reviewers for their useful and constructive comments.

As suggested by both reviewers, we narrowed the focus of the paper to our central hypothesis: training affecting retention by increasing self confidence. This led us to entirely restructure and rewrite the paper as a whole, and to change the title.

Major changes are the following:

In the introduction, we introduced a conceptual framework of determinants of retention of qualified staff.

In the methodology section, we used Kirkpatrick's framework for evaluating the training programme which allows for distinction between satisfaction, competence and actual behaviour, responding to concerns of both reviewers. This led us to reorient the focus to evaluation, and give less importance to the action research methodology in general.

We specified the research questions, and restructured methods and results sections accordingly.

Due to methodological weaknesses (our strongest evidence related to the training concerns satisfaction, and far less competences and behaviour), we were more prudent in drawing affirmative conclusions on the effects of training on retention. However, relying on in depth understanding provided by participant field observation, we developed in the discussion hypotheses about further mechanisms likely to explain how training improves retention, besides our initial hypothesis of increased self confidence in one's own capacities: self esteem as rural doctor and training's supporting function within a professional group.

We believe that general comments of both reviewers are taken into consideration in this revised version. Most specific comments of reviewer 1 are also addressed through the general reorientation of the paper; some of them however were no longer applicable, as they dealt with sentences which disappeared in the revised version.