

Reviewer's report

Title: The Providers of Health Services in Lebanon: A Survey of Physicians

Version: 1 **Date:** 29 September 2005

Reviewer: Steve Slade

Reviewer's report:

The authors have addressed some important questions with their work and should be congratulated for their effort.

The paper tackles two basic questions or topic areas. They are:

- 1) The question of physician supply in Lebanon - what is the doctor-to-population ratio, is it too high or too low, how does it compare to other countries, etc.; and
- 2) What are the demographic and practice characteristics of Lebanon's physician workforce.

The latter seems to be well within the scope of the paper, given the information that was gathered through the survey. Although the information gathered for the study is relevant to the question of overall physician supply, it is not clear that the data collected for the study is strong enough to support the conclusions and recommendations that are put forward.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Within the Methods section of the paper it is noted that World Health Organization population estimates were used for the study. This data source is not referenced in Table 1 and, in fact, it is not clear if WHO data is the source for regional results presented in the table.

The report notes that physicians can be registered with two professional associations within Lebanon. It also notes that "the database was checked to ensure no duplicates in memberships". Were all records on the databases of both professional organizations checked for duplicates or did the investigators only check to see that there were no duplicates among the sample of 388 physicians?

The first paragraph of the Provider Characteristics section describes certain demographic characteristics of the sample (e.g., 84% male, average age = 42.5 years). It would be helpful to know these same demographic characteristics for the entire physician population.

Also within the Provider Characteristics section, it is not clear if the results are based on the sample of 377 survey respondents or the entire physician population.

Within the Practice Characteristics section a couple of p values are given. What is the associated test statistic and its value?

The report references a Table 12. I believe the reference should be to Table 9.

The total in Table 3 (n=378) is greater than the respondent sample size (n=377).

Minor Essential Revisions

The following sentence is ambiguous: "Contrary to expectations, graduates of the one region of the world were almost evenly distributed between urban and rural areas".

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

It may be because I am not familiar with Lebanon's cultural environment, but I am not sure why certain medical specialties would be "culturally unfavorable" to women. Clearly women are more likely to practice as general practitioners, but it is unclear what makes other specialties more "technically and physically demanding" and/or "culturally unfavorable".

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests