

Reviewer's report

Title: Human resources and the quality of the emergency obstetric care in developing countries: a systematic review of the literature

Version: 1 **Date:** 21 June 2008

Reviewer: Kaspar Wyss

Reviewer's report:

Based on a literature review, the manuscript presents available evidence on human resource related issues to emergency care in low income countries. The paper is based on a clearly detailed methodology and nicely outlines the results of the literature review.

The manuscript does not yet comply with the instructions for authors of Human Resources for Health. The authors should carefully read these instructions and for example add an abstract. Figure 1 and table 1 should be placed at the end of the text.

In Table 1 there is still a French expression "aspects non mesurés". Please translate into English

Most importantly, the discussion and conclusions section should substantially be strengthened. As the section stands it is essentially a discussion of the limits of the review. The section does not summaries the evidence presented in the result section and discuss the evidence in the light of current international efforts for HR development. How do the results relate to current policy discussions for example around of training community affiliated cadre or TBAs for substituting professional staff such as mid-wives? Can anything said about the implications of the findings on current efforts to scale-up priority interventions for example in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment especially PMCTC? What are the policy implications of the results? How do the findings and the available evidence related to the MDGs especially MDG #5? As said above, the discussion and conclusion section is yet not specific enough and needs to be rewritten.

In addition, there is a need to improve the following aspects:

- Section on data extraction and synthesis (page 3): It is not entirely clear how the "data extraction index card" once established was used for the subsequent analysis. Please specify.
- Please specify for which period the table of contents of the journals Lancet, Int J Gynaecology and Obstetrics and Reproductive Health Matters was screened.
- What means "snowball" in Figure 1? This is not described in the methods section. Does snowball mean that once an article identified references listed within this article were screened?
- In section 3.1.1 on HR availability: can anything said about demographic

aspects especially gender? For some countries males being involved in emergency obstetric care has been identified as a problem

- In section 3.1.1. For discussing HR availability only a normative basis is being considered (“new standards are estimated at twenty midwives, or equivalent staff, and health centres of 60 to 80 beds in a district of 120’000”). There are also predictive and empirical approaches for analysing HR needs (and compare them subsequently with the HR availability) such as Workload indicators of staffing need (WISN). Please consider to refer to these approaches which might be in many context more relevant for reviewing the HR availability for emergency obstetric care
- Why not the whole results section is structure along the logic of table 1? Please consider to include section 3.3.on other aspects of EmOC quality into the previous sections. For example, section 3.3.1 on material resources could come strictly spoken earlier as this section is essentially on structural aspects in the Donabedian framework

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.