

Reviewer's report

Title: Incentives for retaining and motivating health workers in Pacific and Asian countries

Version: 1 **Date:** 20 September 2007

Reviewer: John Colin Harris Dewdney

Reviewer's report:

General comments:

1. This paper addresses a very important and timely issue
2. It is well reasoned
3. It is 'relatively balanced'
4. The standard of writing is acceptable
5. Does it add anything of importance to the messages in the classic paper of Wibulpolprasert and Pengpaiboon - Human Resources for Health 2003, 1:12 (Ref no 16 in this paper)? Yes, for example the mention of informal fees, some discussion of dual employment, and mention of 'group' contracting arrangements such as those operated in Cambodia - although one should add that the most successful of these arrangements in Cambodia included ex-patriate direction and financial support from NGOs. But of course since this is a 'literature review paper' it does not uncover anything really 'new'. (It would be helpful to policy makers, planners and managers to have some guidance regarding the structural, staffing and financial implications of implementing the strategies we see reported - lamentably these considerations get little mention in the literature.)
6. The References and Additional References listings include much of the relevant and reasonable accessible available published material

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

7. NIL

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

8. Figure 2 needs checking - the U5M rates there are rather different from those for 2005 in the country statistics from UNICEF at http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Thailand_statistics.html

eg Cambodia Fig 2 140, UNICEF 98; Solomons Fig2 around 57, UNICEF 29; etc
etc

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

9. Almost all of the material discussed in this paper relates to ASEAN and Western Pacific countries - I wonder whether "Incentives for retaining and motivating health workers in Pacific and South-East Asian countries" would be a more appropriate title?

10. Unless there are particular reasons for their inclusion, the inclusion of "tiny population countries" such as Nauru, Niue, Kiribati and Tuvalu in the same figure or table as, say, China, India, Indonesia always strikes me as somewhat inappropriate - perhaps they appear in this paper "for the sake of completeness".

11. I would prefer to see all the countries in Figure 1 shown in Figure 2

12. A summary table of the strategies mentioned in the paper - somewhat along the lines of Table 1 and appropriately classified - would be handy.

13. The 'Conclusion' section of the paper might mention that the provision of incentives is not the only strategy available for addressing urban-rural staffing imbalances or stemming the out-migration of trained personnel - but detailed discussion of that topic would have to be, and has been though not to sufficient extent, the subject of other papers.

14. A rather common point made in the usually hortatory 'conclusions' to papers such as this one is the need for 'innovative approaches' - it is not often clear whether this means the application of already tried strategies etc in new settings, or the generation of really 'new' strategies - there don't seem to be many 'new' strategies being generated. (This is a general remark, not a pointer to a 'discretionary revision'.)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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