

Reviewer's report

Title: Health workforce development planning in the Sultanate of Oman: a case study

Version: 1 **Date:** 1 April 2009

Reviewer: Syed Raza Shabbir

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Introduction:

This is an empirical case study addressing the general audience in domain of human resource development and health management sector. It is based upon the ideology of transformation policy and development of health workforce in Sultanate of Oman from heavy reliance upon foreign work force to local workforce without compromising the quality of the service. Health sector is an essential and politically important area of interest for most governments. However to deliver quality based service to the clients it is important to form a good framework of health infrastructure. Author has focussed upon two essential components of such a framework, i.e. availability of the skilled human resource and network of Health institutions. Health is a costly commodity and faces major economical and financial constraints in the human resource sector in the form of heavy salaries to the staff including privileges. However, most cost effective way for any health system would be to rely on internal resources by developing and training skilled staff to combat financial constraints.

The transitional process is supported in this study by highlighting overall evolution of health care system in Oman in partnership with international agencies, i.e as WHO(World Health Organization), who collaborated in close coordination with the MOH (Ministry of Health), Oman to accomplish the desired objectives. Appropriate methodologies pertinent to stepwise planning process are elaborated and supported along with statistical and graphical data.

Discussion:

Health sector is the most expensive commodity with significant financial constraints. Bulk of the spending is on the human resource recruitment, development and salary packaging contracts. Therefore, it is vital to develop a strategy to develop and internal human resource to conserve financial re-sourcing. In this article this basic concept has been addressed in a holistic approach. Planning of Ministry of health under the vision of leadership and political will to develop internal human resource at a steady pace without compromising upon the quality of service has been emphasized as a core contact.

Research methods adopted in this case study seem to be consistent with the type of the study. It is a retrospective study that gives a comparison of the previous findings with that of the current findings in terms if the workforce status

in Ministry of Health. This is an empirical study supported with the supportive data with significant evidence of improvement in the health workforce status in Sultanate of Oman. These figures have been quoted from the Ministry of health, Sultanate of Oman's official website with logical arguments supported by clear and succinct tables coherent with the format of currently accepted standards of data presentation. Data indicated in the study seems to be a quantitative, presented statistically in a trend like manner and substantively meaningful consistently focussing upon the study question with clearly stated findings. Good comparison of the health workforce has been elaborated in the forms of tables and graphs indicating overall significant increase in the population / staff ratios and overall increase in local health workforce proportionate to expansion of the health services. The precision of the data has limitation of assessment in the absence of well defined confidence intervals, but can be overruled as it is not a cohort study or a randomized controlled trial. The validity and can be reliably ascertained by the references given in the study. Comparisons in the forms of peer reviews detailed in the form of statistical indicators in peer health care systems give evidence of the statistical significance , whereas generalize ability to other health care systems has limited application.

Writing style of the author is clear concise and correct with effective communications of the ideas using direct straightforward and unambiguous words and phrases. Technically and grammatically, article is free from errors, except on page 12, paragraph 2, first line, one full stop is extra.

Author has been able to effectively project quantitative improvements in overall health care improvement in terms of expansion of health infrastructure and human resource. Policy issues and the planning methodology has been very well described based on need based analysis. Staff development and training strategies has been addressed adequately to emphasize the role of staff retention in addition to strategies of overcoming recruitment difficulties in Ministry of Health. Involvement of other organizations such as WHO has been coopted well in the discussion as partners in developing teams and planning process. Workforce assessment tools by Delphi techniques and WISN (workload indicators of staffing needs) were used to work out need based analysis of the workforce required. Difficulties encountered in planning workforce such as lack of human resource expertise is documented and measures taken to overcome such difficulties with strategic planning is well explained.

Conclusion:

The article definitely addresses the key issue of Health workforce development and planning in the Sultanate of Health Oman. Arguments have been supported by concise and simple data elaborated in time line fashion. Strategies of planning process and the limitations encountered have been addressed in the article. This article effectively reveals the evidence of human resource development in health sector in Sultanate of Oman. There has been no missing or follow up data noted. No confounding factors were noticed to have an impact upon the study. Good peer reviews elaborated in the data indicate the successful policies and strategies adopted to achieve the goal of self reliance in health sector with Omani health workforce and at the same time improve the recruitment process for

foreign work force without compromise upon the quality of service.

Overall, an excellent article for the interest of health managers and for research purpose. Can be published as such with only one grammatical error correction as highlighted above in page 12,para 2 .

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable