Reviewer’s report

Title: Sector switching amongst histopathologists in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: A qualitative study

Version: 2 Date: 8 November 2012

Reviewer: Nicola Barsdorf

Reviewer’s report:

I would like to commend the authors for tackling such an important topic. This is an area that certainly needs research attention and advocacy. This said, I believe that it is necessary for the authors to make some major revisions in order for this paper to be of sufficient quality for publication. I strongly support the major revisions so that this paper may be shared with the broader research and policy community.

I have attached a scanned pdf with hand-written comments to this review, but would like to point to some of the major comments below:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Methods: I am not certain that an exploratory and descriptive case study approach would count as grounded theory, nor whether it would require inductive reasoning. I recommend that the authors “call a spade a spade” and state that this is an exploratory and descriptive piece of qualitative enquiry. I also recommend that the authors consult an expert in qualitative research methods, who might be able to advise and guide the authors in their approach to the analysis and in their write up of the results/discussion. In qualitative research, one cannot generalise to other populations. Also, it is not recommended to report findings as percentages, nor response rates. What you would like to report on, ultimately, after conducting such qualitative research, is the “essence” of what this group of people are telling us, the major messages or “themes” that would convey the important aspects of this topic to outsiders.

2. Discussion: The way in which the discussion is written up is at present inadequate. It reads as a listing of each of the comments from respondents, with little reference to arguments from the literature. Since the discussion should be an examination of the study results, in relation to existing theory and empirical evidence, the current discussion section does little to make a convincing argument. Since I support the importance of this topic in the field of health research, I would hate to see a potentially well-written paper go to waste. I would recommend a rewriting of this section to reflect the themes that emerged from the collective data, in relation to the themes that emerged in other studies, and in relation to the existing literature and theory i.e. Lee’s theory.

In this light, there are a couple of pieces currently in the literature review section
that should be moved to the discussion. I have pointed to these in the attached scanned paper.

Minor Essential Revisions

The literature review currently reads in a disjointed fashion. If I may recommend a revised ordering of the content, this might help with the flow:

• Introduction – good summary as it stands
• Adapting Lee’s push-pull
• Public private partnerships
  o General intro until line 11 of p.6
  o Inequality paragraph
  o Public sector facts
  o Private sector facts
  o Piece on where health practitioners practice
  o Piece on migration across
• Importance of med lab medicine
  o Generally why its important
  o Shortage of lab professionals globally and reasons
  o Shortage in Africa and subSaharan Africa
  o Labour market for Histos in South Africa
• End with a formulation of the problem (so that this motivates why you did the study in the first place)

Discretionary Revisions

Kindly see a number of small revisions in-text in the attached scanned pdf

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**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