

## **Reviewer's report**

**Title:** Overseas-trained pharmacists in Britain: what do registration data tell us about recruitment of overseas pharmacists?

**Version:** 1 **Date:** 8 December 2008

**Reviewer:** Ruth Young

### **Reviewer's report:**

This is an interesting article on an important and novel topic. Little has been published in general on the pharmacy workforce (especially regarding migration) either in the UK or internationally compared with other health professions. For this reason alone the paper should be of interest both to UK and international audiences. In addition, the fact that the data reveal UK pharmacy's comparative greater reliance on European migration sources compared with other professions is particularly interesting. The paper is therefore timely given the increasing interest in this topic at policy level (for example with the publication of the EU Green Paper on the health workforce). It is also essentially well written and the methods and data reporting are appropriate to the task set out. I would therefore recommend publication with the following revisions, which primarily relate to enhancing the level of discussion in the results section and the conclusions; and the need for greater clarity around definitions of terms used:

Minor essential revisions:

1. Results/Discussion - My main comment here relates to the fact that the sub-sections could be more helpfully written up around analytical themes rather than types of data analysed. For example, the subsection entitled "Registered addresses" seems to be about two issues - geographical distribution within GB, and (possibly?) return migration to countries of origin. In the section on "Changes between register extracts in 2007 and 2006", the last sentence says that these data support "analysis presented earlier when exploring overseas trained pharmacists with an overseas address in 2007". Might it be better to discuss this all together in a single section on, for example, lengths of stay in GB? If the authors took this themed approach then the subsection titles could also usefully reflect the change to refer to the themes/types of findings revealed not data types analysed.
2. Results/Discussion - again in the section on "Registered addresses" - The authors state earlier that the results section will focus on pharmacists with a GB address but this sub-section appears to include those with a registered addresses abroad (which is confusing and needs clarification).
3. Results/Discussion (p17) This talks about the recommendation that GB actively recruit more pharmacists from abroad. It is interesting that no mention is made of wider debates on the "ethics" of such an approach (ethical recruitment

policy; Codes of Practice on international recruitment etc). Also could the authors comment on the implications of such a reliance for the GB workforce (re. workforce planning, reliance on potentially more mobile workforce due to possibilities of return migration etc). Such issues are very important and should be part of a strengthened discussion (and Conclusion).

4. Conclusions - These need to be strengthened, for example, taking in implications of issues such as lengths of stay, geographical distribution, return migration etc for the GB workforce (and sources?). Also on p20 "countries of origin" are referred to but earlier the authors said no such data were available - so do they mean "world regions"? The statement is made that GB does not rely on overseas pharmacists as much as it does in other health professions - is that the interesting contrast? Or would it be more interesting looking to the future to highlight the fact of pharmacy's greater reliance on European sources compared with other professions? Finally, it would be very helpful if the Conclusions acknowledged that this sort of analysis should be a stepping to more sophisticated research on the pharmacy workforce - and suggested some more lines of future enquiry.

5. Definitions - This comment applies in the abstract, methods and results sections. Much greater clarity is needed on definitions and consistency about where in the article definitions are provided. For example: a) GB is defined in results on p8 but it would have been useful to be told this information earlier; b) adjudication and reciprocal routes - it is left quite late to tell the reader what these are; c) Europe - Is this the EEA? What countries are included?; d) Overseas - Particularly in the abstract the authors could be clearer about what is meant by overseas or international. In medicine (in UK) "overseas" would more likely refer to professionals qualified outside the EEA. Might it be better to use the overall term "internationally-qualified" and explain that is referring to both Europe (EEA?) and elsewhere overseas? Overall, one section containing all definitions would be helpful.

6. Methods - More detail of analyses undertaken would be useful in the methods section to help the reader link in with information in other sections of the paper. For example, in the final sentence (p5) it says "differences between pharmacists" were explored. Based on later sections, these differences appear to be around gender, ethnic origin and the links to workforce participation, but it would be good to be told here so the reader knows what to expect.

7. Other proof reading/editing comments: p12 - 96.7% is mentioned twice but one figure is supposed to be higher than the other? p13 - The sentence "It is possible to look in more detail at which overseas countries pharmacists live in" could be deleted to get straight into the discussion on return migration etc. p12 - The sentence "While 83.3% of GB-trained pharmacists..." needs checking for correct wording.

**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.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests