

## **Author's response to reviews**

**Title:** Human Resource Management in the Georgian National Immunization Program: a Baseline Assessment

### **Authors:**

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**Version:** 3 **Date:** 30 November 2006

**Author's response to reviews:** see over

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November 30, 2006

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**Re: Journal Submission of “Human Resource Management in the Georgian National Immunization Program: a Baseline Assessment”**

Please reconsider our revised manuscript for publication in your journal, *Human Resources for Health*. We have attempted to address all of the reviewers’ comments and to reflect these changes we have also changed the title of the manuscript. Our work describes the perceptions of managers and front-line health workers of the human resource management within the primary health care system in Georgia. The manuscript will inform current efforts aimed to improve health care system performance and reform across the CEE/NIS region, where human resource practices are generally weak.

The manuscript has not been published elsewhere. We presented a poster based upon the manuscript at the Canadian Conference for International Health in October 2006. None of the authors declare any conflict of interest.

You will find a line by line response to the reviewers’ comments in the following pages. We look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,

Laura C. Esmail  
PhD Candidate

## **Reviewer Comments and Author Responses**

-----Original Message-----

From: Dr Ellen E. Nolte [mailto:ellen.nolte@lshtm.ac.uk]

Sent: 24 June 2006 16:15

To: hrhjournal

Cc: HRH Editorial

Subject: MS ID: 5176333110506219- Dr Ellen E. Nolte has returned a report

Dr Ellen E. Nolte has returned a report on this manuscript. Please see the comments below.

MS ID: 5176333110506219

Title: Optimizing Human Resource Management: Lessons from the Georgian National Immunization Program.

Journal: Human Resources for Health

Authors: Laura Esmail, Jillian Clare Cohen Dr and Mamuka Djibuti Dr

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

Countries emerging from the former Soviet Union continue to face considerable challenges in reforming their health care systems, and there is a need to better understand the consequences for the healthcare workforce so as to identify strategies for successful reform. The present analysis aims to describe current human resource management practices in Georgia, using the Georgian immunization programme as an example. It could therefore make an important contribution to the emerging evidence on potential benefits of more effective human resource management. However, there are some aspects to the study as presented in the manuscript that the authors are invited to consider so as to improve its quality further:

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**Major Compulsory Revisions**

#### Introduction/Background 1.

The introduction/background is somewhat long and could benefit from shortening by focusing on the key aspects relevant to the subject of the paper, in particular as it relates to the background description of health care reform in Georgia (p. 6-8), with some unnecessary repetition of an earlier description in the introduction section (p. 4/5).

**AUTHOR'S RESPONSE: We have shortened and edited the introduction and background accordingly (pg 4-8).**

#### Research objective

2. The stated research objective is "to assess and document the current state of the National Immunization Program (NIP) in Georgia and to identify human resource management practices" - however, the study as presented in the manuscript focuses on human resources management practices within NIP; the NIP as such is not being assessed and/or documented. This needs to be clarified.

**AUTHOR'S RESPONSE: Research objective has been clarified (pg 9).**

#### Methods

3. Human resource management (HRM) is at the centre of the study, yet it not clear how HRM is being defined and there is also a need to specify the underlying conceptual framework, in particular as it relates to the dimensions of HRM the authors seek to assess (p. 10, survey indicators and p. 11, 'research topics' for focus groups). The authors are thus asked to provide a concise description of the theoretical framework guiding their analysis of HRM.

**AUTHOR'S RESPONSE: Conceptual framework addressed on page 9.**

4. Sampling/survey: it is not clear how randomization of districts and healthcare workers was undertaken. Also, there needs to be a description of how refusal to participate (if any) was addressed.

**AUTHOR'S RESPONSE: We inserted clarifications on page 10.**

5. How were the participants of focus groups selected? Where these part of the intervention or control group? What was their size/composition (e.g. ratio CPH managers - facility heads/workers)?

**AUTHOR'S RESPONSE: Clarifications made on page 11-12.**

#### Results

6. The results section requires a basic description of the sample (and focus groups) as it relates to age, sex, urban-rural; how representative is the sample for the workforce population in the NIP programme (e.g. response rate?).

**AUTHOR'S RESPONSE: These issues were addressed more clearly on page 13 in the text and more demographic information was provided in Tables 1 and 2(see pages 31 and 32).**

#### Discussion

7. It is difficult to assess the overall findings of the present paper because of the lack of a conceptual/theoretical framework guiding through the analysis. The overall conclusions derived by the authors seem to be very reasonable, however, they do not necessarily flow from the findings of this analysis, mainly because of many assumptions underlying the analysis have not been clearly described, thus undermining the overall quality of the paper.

**AUTHOR'S RESPONSE: Discussion (p21-24) and Conclusion (p25) were revised accordingly.**

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory 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.

-----Original Message-----

From: Carl-Ardy Dubois [mailto:carl.ardy.dubois@umontreal.ca]

Sent: 24 July 2006 04:55

To: hrhjournal

Cc: HRH Editorial

Subject: MS ID: 5176333110506219- Carl-Ardy Dubois has returned a report

Carl-Ardy Dubois has returned a report on this manuscript. Please see the comments below.

MS ID: 5176333110506219

Title: Optimizing Human Resource Management: Lessons from the Georgian National Immunization Program.

Journal: Human Resources for Health

Authors: Laura Esmail, Jillian Clare Cohen Dr and Mamuka Djibuti Dr

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

This article reports the results of a research that intended to assess and document the current state of the National Immunization Program in Georgia and to identify human resource management (HRM) practices or constraints that may impede its performance. It is clear that the topic of this paper is of high interest to policy makers in a range of countries. However, although the objective is clearly stated, the evidence provided in this paper does not allow to establish a clear association between failures of the Immunisation program and the current human resource management practices. At best the authors provide with an interesting description of perceptions of the HRM process from the perspectives of key stakeholders. But they completely fail to objectify any relationship between the performance of the immunisation program and HRM practices.

**AUTHOR'S RESPONSE: The reviewer's comment is well-taken. The study does not assume that the poor performance of the immunization program is directly related to poor human resource management. The study's contribution is towards a baseline assessment of current human resource management practices in the immunization program of Georgia. We have discussed the potential of HRM practice to improve immunization performance (in the discussion), however this is qualified. The main thrust of the paper is indeed, to provide perceptions of front-line workers and their managers of the current issues within organizational structure and supervision/management in relation to immunization.**

**\*\*\*The paper has been revised substantially to reflect this (see Title, Research Objective, Discussion and Conclusion).**

In addition to these general comments, I will emphasize some key points:

1. Although HRM is the main focus of this paper, the analysis of the HR context in which the immunisation program is implemented is quite sketchy. Beyond the perceptions of the stakeholders, the authors should provide with objective data on the human resources

involved in this program: their numbers, their distribution, their levels of training, their working conditions, the mechanisms used to supervise their work and monitor their performance, the prevailing system of incentives. Such information would allow to identify HRM problems that serve as bottlenecks to effective implementation of the Immunisation program.

**AUTHOR’S RESPONSE: We have included objective data on the human resources involved. See description in the background on page 7. See Results page 13 with new information on rural/urban distribution, training, etc (see Table 2 on page 32).**

2. Another important weakness of this paper is the complete absence of a theoretical or conceptual framework on which the authors could draw to pursue the research objective. It is not clear how the variables examined in this study have been selected.

**AUTHOR’S RESPONSE: See “Methodology: Research Design” (page 9) for definition of HRM; see “Data Collection: Surveys” (page 10-11) for rationale for selection of variables in survey.**

3. The selection of the sample raises several questions that are not discussed at all in the paper. 15 districts were selected for the intervention group. Another 15 districts were selected for the control group. Does the intervention group refer to districts that have experimented particular HRM practices as part of the IDRC program? What are these practices? It is also surprising that the possible differences between the intervention and control group are not reported and not discussed. The focus of the discussion rather turns to differences between urban and rural areas.

**AUTHOR’S RESPONSE: we clarified selection of the sample on page 10. We selected intervention and control districts in order to test the effectiveness of intervention, however this paper only reports baseline data of HRM practices prior to any training or intervention. We did not go into details of describing the intervention, since the intervention itself was not the focus of the paper. However, we are open to further suggestions from the reviewers on this point.**

4. Most details should also be provided about the instruments used particularly for the survey: validity and reliability of the instruments, the theoretical support to the choice of the variables.

**AUTHOR’S RESPONSE: Face validity and content validity were assessed by the investigators. The reliability of the instruments used in this study were not examined through specific analysis. The survey is based upon instruments used in previous studies implemented in Georgia (see Hotchiss et al 2006). See page 10-11 under “Data Collection: Surveys”. Also, the consistency of focus group results with survey responses provides additional evidence supporting the validity of the Likert-scale surveys used. This limitation was discussed on page 24-25.**

Overall, I do not think that this paper can be published in its current state. Major revisions would be needed to address the issues previously raised.

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## Major Compulsory Revisions

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

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions.

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.