

## **Reviewer's report**

**Title:** Ageing medical workforce - where will our leadership come from?

**Version:** 1 **Date:** 19 August 2009

**Reviewer:** Catherine Joyce

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

This paper addresses the important topic of retirement rates for health professionals, and provides an empirical study of retirement rates of Australian doctors, which are then used to project future workforce numbers.

I found the paper difficult to follow at times, and would like to see a clearer presentation of some of the material (as indicated below) as well as an expanded discussion of implications.

#### **MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS:**

1 Page 2, para 3: Is the final sentence of the para meant to read "...43 per cent of the current (or 2000) general practitioner workforce..."

2 Page 3, para 1 Only 1 reference is given for the intergenerational reports - the 2002 report. No citation is provided for the 2007 report.

3 Page 5, para 1: It is not clear what the source is for the data on average age of practitioners. Table 1 is not required. All the information included in the table is already in the text.

How were "medical educators" defined?

There is an assumption that medical practitioners move from being clinicians to being medical educators but what is the evidence that this occurs?

It is not clear what the phrase "assuming that there is no workforce exit" means in the final sentence of this para ("In twenty years time..."). (This is also used elsewhere in the paper.)

It is also not clear why this information on medical educators is placed first in the results section.

4 Page 6, para 2: Why are these data presented here rather than in the following subsections? The subsection is called "Characteristics of medical educators".

I am perplexed by the claim that there will be 170 male GPs aged 45-49 in 2025. The size of this figure suggests that this relates only to those who were in the workforce in 2000, and does not take account of those entering the workforce after that point, but this is not made clear. If it does account for workforce entrants as well as exits, then the methods used for this are not explained sufficiently clearly. These comments apply equally to the other figures in this para.

5 Page 6, para 3: It would be more descriptive if the subheading for this section referred to either the time period (1985-2005) and/or "number of practitioners".

6 Page 7, para 3: What is the basis for the p value reported? What type of analysis was undertaken?

7 Page 8, para 2: Prior to the presentation of the projections, I would have found it useful to see some information on the historical net attrition rates which form the basis of the projections.

8 Page 9, para 4: The information presented on "current age of health care professionals" is for medical professionals only, is not the most recent data available and repeats what was presented in the results section.

9 Page 10, para 1: I am perplexed by the claim that the number of GPs and specialists in the 45-49 and 50-54 age groups will be less in twenty years time than now. How can you say what these numbers will be without projecting entrants as well as exits? See also comment (4) on Page 6, para 2 above.

10 Discussion section: The Discussion section (including the Conclusion) is quite repetitive and does little more than re-state the findings. It needs to be strengthened to provide a better indication of the implications and the importance of the study's findings (the "so what?" question).

The implications for providing medical education is certainly one issue, and this is mentioned, although I think further discussion is required to link the number of clinicians with the provision of medical education. Broader medical workforce policy implications could also be discussed.

11 Discussion section: There is no discussion of the limitations of the study. What are the key assumptions made in the projections and what are these sensitive to? For example: How likely is it that the rates of retirement will remain steady in the future? What factors would be likely to impact on them?

12 Title: The paper does not discuss leadership at all.

#### MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS:

13 Page 3, para 1: "Treasury" not "Treasurer"

14 Page 9, para 2: Typo: 50 percent (space needed).

15 Page 9, para 3: The report on the GP workforce is 2005 not 2002.

#### DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS:

16 Page 9: The phrase "the results of this paper" is used twice on this page. I think this should either be "the results of this study" or "the results reported in this paper"

**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