

Reviewer's report

Title: Implementing the WHO integrated tool to assess quality of care for mothers, newborns and children: results and lessons from five districts in Malawi

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Reviewer: Wouter Bakker

Reviewer's report:

General

Very interesting paper with recognisable results. Good, easy understandable and visual overview of QOC in different facilities. Limitations of the study and the tool are very clearly identified and described. Hopefully besides the publication of this paper the results also contribute to improve the care in the supervised facilities.

I have some minor remarks and some subsequent questions.

Introduction

Please review the sentence: '\For example, the ... to benchmark countries.' (rule 38-42). Because of the brackets after the comma it is not an easy to read and understandable sentence. Just very minor issue.

I miss a reference of the tool being used in 'Ethiopia and elsewhere' and would like to have a short sentence on previous experiences with the tool. And does a reference to the actual (components of) the tool itself exist?

Methods

What was the reason to include a internal reviewer in the district hospitals and a fully external team in the health centres (BEmOC facilities)? Was this because lack of staff?

Is it possible to provide some baseline characteristics for the facilities assessed? As in number of beds, patients. This would give an insight in the scale and effect of the QOC assessment.

Results

Is there any insight in the reasons behind the differences between the districts? Would be interesting as opportunities for improved, especially on infrastructure level in a district.

A major limitation is that the criteria for QOC in the tool sometimes are vague and hard to assess ,but this is well described in the discussion.

Table 1: What I really miss is the translation of the criteria to the Likert score. It is hard to reproduce the sometimes vague criteria (what is an adequate availability of blood products for a facility, what is an acceptable patient flow etc.), even comparing with the Malawi standards of care, which also not always provide clear answers. There might be a great risk of inter-observer variability. I understand this has more to do with the tool design than with the study design, but is limitation when it comes to interpretation of the results. I value the extensive recommendations on the use of the tool, that makes this paper strong and important.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?

If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?

If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?

If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?

If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English

Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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