Reviewer's report

Title: Easier said than done!: Methodological challenges with conducting maternal death review research in Malawi

Version: 2 Date: 25 February 2013

Reviewer: Sally SR Rankin

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript is an important addition to the literature on maternal death reviews. It is a readable, thoughtful and helpful piece. The manuscript is well organized and the use of the mortality surveillance cycle provides a clear and useful framework. My primary concerns requiring revision are:

1) The size of the sample is unclear; the authors make reference to 43 cases but then point out the problems with many of these cases.

2) I am unclear why the size of the sample is so small since the maternal mortality rate in Malawi is relatively high. This needs to be addressed by the authors.

3) Because the sample was so small some of the recommendations are inappropriate, especially the recommendation that there should be greater focus on skilled birth attendants. This is especially relevant in light of Malawi’s frequently changing recommendations and support for traditional birth attendants.

4) Some of the references are very outdated, i.e., 1951, 1982. There are many newer books on diagnosis. Additionally, we usually refer to differential diagnosis rather than medical diagnosis.

Minor essential revisions:

5) There are a number of spelling errors as well as incorrect choice of words but these are easily remedied. I would recommend that the primary author obtain an editor whose first language is English.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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.