Reviewer's report

Title: Inherent illnesses and attacks: an ethnographic study of the role of hospital care-seeking for Acute Respiratory Infections (ARIs) in children in Manhica, Southern Mozambique

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Reviewer: Gretel H. Pelto

Reviewer's report:

This is an excellent paper and an important contribution to the literature on ARI in children. Moreover it provides interesting insights that go beyond the topic of ARI. It also makes some thoughtful suggestions for future research.

Among the strengths of the paper are:

1. Excellent use of relevant literature to set the context for the paper. The authors clearly know the literature.

2. Good sampling procedures.
   It would be good to have information on number of refusals, but this is not essential. Why the gender difference in the sample? It would be useful if the authors offered some comment, even if it is speculative, about why there are more males and than females. Is this differential care-seeking?

3. Effective use of quotations to illustrate points in the findings reflects good presentation of qualitative data and helps the reader to interpret the general statements.

4. The advantage of using the WHO FES protocol and providing a good description of which components (modules) they used is that the results can be readily compared to other ARI studies that used the same protocol.

5. The explanation (p. 17) for why the respondents could not identify the illness (based on the symptoms presented by the investigators) is thoughtful and insightful. It illustrates another point that the authors could also make: namely that what investigators think they are asking (which may seem very straightforward) is often interpreted differently than the investigators intend. In this case, the distinction made by the respondents between an attack (with specific symptoms) and an underlying illness not only explains the respondents’ difficulty in answering, but also shows that they interpreted the question differently than the investigators intended because the investigators actually wanted to understand the illness concepts and thought they were asking about these.

6. “Definitions of terms for illnesses, biomedical or local, are fluid and interchangeable so that what may apply now may not be the case in even a
year’s time [32, 33].” This is an important point and very appropriate for the larger discussion.

Some items to correct:

1. There are some small problems with English grammar and choice of words that should be cleared up before publication.

2. The following statement is not clear and should be rewritten: “As well as health status not being so clearly categorised into an either/or opposition,…” Similarly, the meaning of the following statement is obscure: “Whist distinctions are useful to explore differences, the dependence of determined binary opposites would have been limiting. “ In trying to avoid jargon the writers seem to fall into the trap of using jargon. Most readers will have great difficulty understanding the point that is being alluded to, and the vast majority won’t care or find this persuasive.

3. The discussion section contains some redundancies with the section describing the results. The paper could be “tightened up” by saving some of the points that are made in the results for the discussion. Some readers would, undoubtedly, prefer a tighter presentation. However, this is a matter of judgment.

**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