Reviewer’s report

Title: Health seeking and access to care for children with suspected dengue fever in Cambodia

Version: 1 Date: 17 May 2007

Reviewer: Peter Winch

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

#1. In the Background section, it takes the reader a long time to determine what the paper is about.
#2. The methods section is confusing. Sample sizes are given for some methods, but not others. The procedure for selecting research participants are given for some methods, but not others. The entire data management and analysis section is exceedingly vague viz. “All data were entered into computer”.
#3. The first paragraph of the Conclusions section illustrates the problems with the Results section: “As illustrated, the women who participated in the study selected therapeutic options based on 1) perceptions of the severity of the child’s health condition, 2) their confidence in the particular modality, practitioner or service, and 3) the affordability of the service. Women's definition of severity and availability of money were the most significant reasons for choice of care. The appearance of and women's ability to recognize dehydrated shock as indicated by cold extremities, high fever and abdominal pain were the ultimate reasons to take children for health care.” This conclusion may be justified, but the data presented in the results section do not lead the reader directly to these conclusions. Most of the data relate to point #3 (affordability), some data to point #2 (confidence), and relatively little to point #1 (perceptions of severity). The entire results section needs to be reworked to present the data in such a way that the reader more naturally is brought to this set of conclusions. Specifically, little primary data is presented on perceptions of severity, or on local illness and symptom terms and their meanings. The most data on this are presented in the first paragraph of the Discussion section, this needs to come earlier in the Results, and in more detail.
#4. The first paragraph of the Results section is an inappropriate opening for this section, the first part of this paragraph could be in the background on study site sections. The first paragraph of the Results section should provide an overview for the reader of the results that will be presented.
#5. The presentation of quotes is inadequate. There is one extended quote, whose purpose (the main point to be derived from it) is unclear. Shorter quotes could be presented throughout the Results section to support the points being made.
#6. Figure 1 is confusing, and the graphics are low quality. It needs to be revised to present a clear message to the reader.
#7. The meaning of coining is never made clear, nor its importance.
#8. There is little in the Results section specifically about dengue. Do therapeutic itineraries for dengue differ from those for other acute illnesses? Why and in what ways?

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: 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'