Reviewer's report

Title: Medicines access: a review of household-level assessing methods

Version: 1 Date: 14 October 2009

Reviewer: Anna Birna Almarsdóttir

Reviewer's report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The authors’ aim is to evaluate methodologies to measure medicine access and explain how access is characterized. As such the question posed is broad and does not totally rhyme with the exclusion made later of all methodologies except surveys.

2. The search strategies used for this review are adequately described, although I do not see why all the exclusions of different methodologies are necessary. Wouldn’t it have been interesting to see the varying methodologies used to study access to medicines?

3. Why include some chronic diseases/medicine groups and then exclude others? Why not include patients/people in insurance schemes? Is information retrieved from such patients not applicable in a more general setting? This is not explained enough to the reader.

4. There is no mention of language restrictions in the search. Was it English, Portuguese, and Spanish? What effect can this have on retrieval?

5. The authors stress that carrying out a literature search on the issue of access to medicines involves a lot of manual work, as there are no clear key words in use. They have to weed through thousands of bibliographic references to find 9 small needles in the haystack. Maybe this result is reflected in all the various exclusions they do at the beginning? Could you reflect on this in the paper?

6. The discussion goes fairly thoroughly through the obstacles to reviewing the concept of medicine access and I agree with them that the concept is ill defined. They then turn to the methodological aspects of access evaluation. Although a very thorough discussion, it could be made more applicable if the authors did two things: Firstly, if they made an attempt to theoretically define “access to medicines” and how this theoretical view of the concept would translate into the operational definition of the concept. Secondly, if they illuminated their very good points by providing the reader with examples of how instruments/questions would be constructed based on their points. As it stands now, the guidelines are too vague for the reader to take note of how they could make an instrument to assess access to medicines.

- Minor Essential Revisions

7. This is a review of a total of 9 articles with various research questions and methods within the scope of household surveying. The manuscript adheres to the
tradition of making an overview in tables and a text explaining what the tables contain. The tables provide a good overview, although there are a couple of terms I think may be clarified or maybe it is the use of English that I do not understand. T.2. Column heading “Subjects recruitment to measure access” – what does this mean? Are these inclusion criteria into the study population?

8. The English needs to be revised in order to be well understood.

- Discretionary

9. The title could be more exciting/catchy: I.e. Access to Medicines – an unclear concept?

**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.