Reviewer's report

Title: Availability and Use of Essential Medicines in China: Manufacturing, Supply, and Prescribing in Shandong and Gansu Provinces

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Reviewer: Zaheer-Ud-din Babar

Reviewer's report:

Availability and use of essential medicines in China

Abstract

In the abstract the sentence “the current healthcare reform in China tackles the problem of access to appropriate medicines for its 1.3 billion people by focusing on providing essential medicines”. What was the year of current health reform? Though the reform has been mentioned in the abstract, it has not been explicitly stated in the introduction.

Background

In the background it has been mentioned that China’s pharmaceutical expenditures are over 40%, one of the highest in the world. This could not be true as in developing countries the pharmaceutical expenditure could range up to 70% of non-personal cost (Quick et al, 1997). Also, as China is not an OECD country and I can’t see the point of comparing it with OECD average.

In the background several recent references (such as reference 1, 3, 5, 9) have been mentioned, however the study was conducted in 2005 (before these references were published). The author may want to build a problem statement by using the data and references and references which were published before 2005. As this study provide evidence for reform process, in the discussion section, they can use recent references to explore the problem and issues.

Methods

On page 4 under selection of survey medicines, it has been mentioned that 77 western medicines (98 unique dosage forms) were collected. However the strength is not mentioned. How medicines with varying strength but the same dosage form was counted?

Discussion

Though it has been discussed that low cost generics were not commonly used in the hospital, however there is a need to add more detail e.g how generics are procured in the hospital? Also, what are patient charges? Do they have to pay for all/some medicines? Does it differ from one hospital to another? If they have to pay, how much?
The same goes for community pharmacies. Is it all out of pocket expenditures? How social health insurance works etc

Overall comments

Overall the study is well written and interesting and can be published after some minor revision. Also, as the study was conducted in 2005, it is important to highlight the pharmaceutical situation and any important changes (since then) in a chronological order.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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