Author's response to reviews

Title: Empirical studies on informal patient payments for health care services: A critical review of research methods and instruments

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Dear Professor Norton,

Enclosed to this letter, you can find our manuscript titled: “Empirical studies on informal patient payments for health care services: A critical review of research methods and instruments”. Authors: Tetiana Stepurko, Milena Pavlova, Irena Gryga and Wim Groot. The authors belong to School of Public Health, Kiev, Ukraine and/or Maastricht University, the Netherlands. On behalf of the authors, I would like to submit this manuscript to your journal for consideration.

We believe that our manuscript could contribute to the research on sensitive topics, and could be especially valuable for researchers on informal patient payments.

Informal patient payments are well-known phenomenon in former-socialist countries but also in other countries worldwide. They represent a major problem in policy and economic analyses of health care provision, e.g. when estimating the total health care expenditure in a country or when analyzing the financial burden to health care consumers. Nevertheless, informal patient payments are a sensitive research topic. The size and frequency of these payments could be over or underestimated in a survey. At present, the lack of methodological publications on this topic hinders a fruitful dialog on how to study these payments. Nevertheless, the number of empirical research in this area is increasing. Studies apply diverse methodology, which makes the comparison of their results rather difficult. To open a dialog on the investigation of informal patient payments, we critically review previous empirical studies on this topic, focusing on data collection mode, respond rate, standardized research instrument, its peculiarities, wording of the questions, recall period. In total, 31 publications were found and analyzed. The size and frequency of informal patient payments reported in these publications are also outlined.

Prof. Norton, please, accept this letter as a short introduction to our manuscript. We hope that your journal would be interested to open a new page in developing methods for studying informal patient payments. Thank you for taking the time to review our paper, and we look forward to a favorable reply.

Sincerely,

Tetiana Stepurko