Author’s response to reviews

Title: Examining Characteristics, Knowledge and Regulatory Practices of Specialized Drug Shops in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review of the Literature

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Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your communication. First allow me to apologize for the unwarranted delay in responding. I was away on compassionate leave due to a personal tragedy, and only just returning to work.

Now, you recommended that we revise the manuscript to adhere to MOOSE guidelines. We think that can only work to a certain level, seeing that this is not a meta-analysis (and we tried not to present it as such because of the variance in the study outcomes and contexts).

What we did was report each review process systematically, including search criteria, study selection, exclusion criteria and review methodology. This is in accordance to the standard CONSORT/MOOSE requirements for systematic reviews. However, as far as findings are concerned, we undertook a narrative synthesis, seeing that these were descriptive (rather than intervention) studies, with virtually no homogeneity of any kind. Any attempt to rank studies or pool estimates would be overtly misleading, a bit like comparing apples and oranges.

Having said that, I have made minor adjustments on the manuscript to reflect the fact that this was a systematic review with no meta-analysis, and emphasizing in the discussion the need to consider context and exercise caution when interpreting the review findings, or extrapolating messages to a different context. We tried as much as possible to discuss patterns emerging across different studies (rather than focusing on findings from individual studies), but we cannot completely discount the possibility of some bias. This we have highlighted in the second paragraph of the discussion section.

We hope that this sufficiently addresses your query. Let me know if we need to attend to anything else.

Thanks and regards

Francis Wafula