Reviewer's report

Title: National Essential Medicines List and Policy Practice: A Case study of China’s Health Care Reform

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Reviewer: Marcus Reidenberg

Reviewer’s report:

The authors took on a very important project, evaluating the initiation of an essential medicines program in China starting in 2009. Unfortunately, the paper discusses far more than the data about the drugs and gives limited information about the implementation, itself.

Much of the discussion in the paragraph immediately below “insert table 1” is a discussion of the issues underlying the implementation of the reform of 2009. They are presented very briefly with too little detail for the reader to understand the magnitude of the problems. This paragraph is not necessary since the background is discussed in the paragraph above and the specifics of the study are in the last paragraph of the introduction. The methods section also includes much that is not directly related to the specifics of the study. For example, whether or not the essential medicines system is one of the biggest achievements of China’s health care reform is irrelevant for a methods section of a scientific paper. I suggest you focus just on the methods you used for this particular study.

In the methods part, I could not understand the idea of co-selection rate as explained.

Under results, the last paragraph of page 6 gave judgments about whether there were enough medicines on the list in various categories without data about what was missing. For example, you write that there should be more medicines for “colds”. Table 2 lists 9 antipyretics, 7 respiratory, and 4 antiallergic medicines. It is impossible for a reader to know what is missing that is effective for “colds”. You write that the medicines for children and dosage forms are insufficient. This is known to be true globally. But your paper gives no indication of the magnitude of the problem in the Chinese list. These are just examples of the conclusions you list in your results section without data in the results that led you to these conclusions.

Your analysis of the supplemental lists is of great relevance to understanding the acceptance of an essential medicines list and using mainly the medicines on such a list. Your data in table 3 is very explanatory and, in my opinion, the most valuable part of this paper.

Your discussion covers many ideas that may be valuable but are not focused on your data. For example, you state that the List has been playing a positive role in guarantying essential medicines. Yet you present no data about availability of
essential medicines at the primary care sites before and after the implementation of the List. What do you mean by “guarantying”? Your detailed comments on p. 9 about rejection of some drugs illustrate the process very well.

Your discussion on pp10-14 is far ranging and discusses many issues about China’s health care but it is not focused on the data in this study. The discussion in a scientific paper usually stays focused on the data itself and what it means.

**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 have been a member of the WHO Expert Committee on the Selection and Use of Essential Medicines and have received travel reimbursement to attend a meeting.

Marcus Reidenberg