Reviewer's report

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

Version: 4 Date: 15 July 2012

Reviewer: Michael A. Albert

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Major Compulsary Revisions

Methodology requires small revision: as described in greater detail below, this paper might be better refered to as a Case Study and Discussion Paper. This should perhaps be added instead of what is written in the "Sample" section. Similarly, it was not entirely clear of the purpose of the interviews and questionnaires. Was this in the determination of the 'soundness' of the choices made for the EML only? It would be good to know a little more about this process and the process of analysis.

The discussion and recommendations do not clearly follow then results and the data. While I find the data and results quite interesting, and indicative of major problems with the EML 2009 in China, I feel the conclusions and recommendations go beyond objective thinking, and move the paper away from a scientific approach towards a opinion/thought paper. And on that note, this would require a more balanced list of alternative recommendations. Does the data really support the abolishment of the supplementary lists? Or does the data simply highlight the need for a more evidence based approach in the selection of the medicines on the supplementary lists? It seems clear that guidelines were not followed. Could a revision process at a central level be an alternative? There are no real options provided. Similarly, a number of challenges have been highlighted in the paper on why EMLs are not providing the results that were intended. While I actually agree that allowing some other medications not under EMLs might improve the situation, again this does not logically follow the results provided. The study showed that the lists have some poor selection and are not founded on evidence, but does not really address the rational prescribing situation in China or the many factors affecting the system in China. These thoughts can be included in the paper, but it should be clear that this is not a direct conclusion from the results of the analysis carried out by the authors.

Minor Essential revisions

Ther are some minor writing issues that ought to be addressed (eg, unnecessary prepositional phrases that detract from the work) .. This could perhaps be done through a quick revision by a copy editor.

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.