Reviewer's report

Title: Assessment of Providers' Referral Decisions in Rural Burkina Faso: A Retrospective Analysis of Medical Registry Records

Version: 2 Date: 13 October 2011

Reviewer: Kennedy Ongwae

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions
1. It is clear from the research methodology that the clinical guidebook is the basis of assessing correctness of diagnosis and referral decisions. The research therefore implies that the national clinical guidebook is possibly the intervention put in place in Burkina Faso to improve patient care including referral. BUT, the methodology has not made any mention as to whether the researchers attempted to assess whether the care providers were aware of the clinical guidebook, were trained on its use, were knowledgeable on its use and actually used the guidebook in patient management. My line of thinking is that if this were done, then the researchers could have disaggregated the providers into users and non users and compared the two groups on the basis of correct diagnosis and appropriate referrals. Finds so obtained would have added more strength to the discussion and helped clarify statement like "two plausible explanations can be put forward for the incorrectness of diagnoses: either the staff did not have sufficient skills to conduct a good physical examination or the staff members were reluctant to use the guidebook". The conclusions and recommendation will also be strong.

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.