Reviewer's report

Title: Removing financial barriers to access reproductive, maternal and newborn health services - the challenges and policy implications for human resources for health in Zimbabwe

Version: 7 Date: 3 February 2013

Reviewer: Diane McIntyre

Reviewer's report:

The paper has been revised substantially and now makes a coherent and far clearer line of argument. There are just a few minor changes that are necessary before the paper is ready for publication.

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS

1. Title – should be newborns (not newborn)

2. Second sentence in the first paragraph of “History of user fees”: Maybe I am not thinking straight, but surely if the ZWD 150 threshold remained unchanged and there was inflation, a decreasing (rather than increasing) proportion of the population were covered by free care? My thinking is that with inflation, people’s salaries and wages would also increase so more would fall above the ZWD 150 threshold if this threshold were retained in nominal terms? The threshold would be reduced in real terms ... again meaning fewer people would be below the threshold?

3. Page 12, para beginning “EQUINET [26] states ...”. Not clear which “recent health system assessment” is being referred to – suggest adding a reference

4. Start of section on “Scope for responding to increased demand ....” – I know it may seem minor, but it would be helpful to make an explicit link between the preceding and this section, i.e. reword first sentence to make it explicit that if the user fee policy is revised to reduce or remove fees, which would translate into improved access and increased utilization of services ...

5. Maybe explain what the HSB is and what its role is.

6. Just before section on “Workload”, it says “[table 5 near here]” – should be table 4

7. Table 4 seems to have major errors in the calculation of “Ratio salary: GDP per capita”. Earlier in the paper, you say GDP is $268 per capita – this would be annually. A doctor’s monthly salary is $218, so annual salary would be $2,616 which is 9.76 times (not 4.4) higher than per capita GDP. For registered nurses, the ratio would be 7.88 and for a general hand, it is 5.69. The text referring to these figures also needs to be changed (both under the table and in the last sentence of the fifth paragraph of the conclusions).

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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