Reviewer's report

Title: Health-seeking behavior in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo: Results from a cross-sectional household survey

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Reviewer: Azusa Sato

Reviewer's report:

All my points are major:
Review for DRC paper

I thought this paper had potential, but a few big questions remain in my mind:
1. what is the originality of the paper?
2. I am not sure what the paper adds theoretically – only empirically, in the sense that authors claim such studies have not been conducted in this one particular area of DRC, if this is the case, is it not just a repetition of other studies? (especially because it does not find anything unusual or surprising).
3. It was not clear to me what the central research question was, because results were scrambled together
4. there are no robustness checks (statistically) and as such, results may not hold once other constraints are imposed. Already there is only one ‘significant’ coefficient in their regressions.

Some other points:
• What is the difference between treatment-seeking actions and health-seeking behaviour? (As per abstract)
• the abstract conclusion does not appear to be consistent with the rest of the paper – the first point, ‘….highlights the lack of efficiency and equity’, is not what the paper set out to analyse. The conclusion, generally, appears out of nowhere and does not link with the rest of the abstract.
• Background is poorly written; when authors state that ‘very few studies regarding this issue are devoted to SSA’, and then go onto say they are all old, the referencing is very selective. There is, in fact, an abundance of papers written on treatment seeking behaviour, both old and more recent. This does not seem to me, to be the reason why their paper should have been written. Better justification is required.
• The part beginning ‘the epidemiological profile’ through to the beginning of the method section is completely out of the blue. Beforehand, some rationale of why the study is being carried out (other than that of ‘there aren’t many’) should be outlined, and background on the health care system, expenditures, insurance (if any) ,average costs, types of care available, health policy generally, should be given.
• The expenditure part of the paper seems like an appendage for the sake of analysing collected data.

• Why was the study carried out in Lubumbashi and not, say, anywhere else in the country?

• I am unclear as to why the sampling corrects for cluster effects by multiplying by two and increasing by 20%?! 

• the household sampling methodology is given, but a diagram would make it much simpler to explain.

• Results: it is confusing there are three numbers given for number of households surveyed: page 7 says 231, page 11 gives 268 and 251. some further explanation is required to clarify.

• I do not know what the ‘profile of surveyed households’ part adds: is it not better to describe (in a table, too), those who were ill, and in more detail, given that the study only refers to this sample?

• Some further discussion on why perception of disease was associated with therapeutic option is needed, as well as robustness checks to see whether such results hold across the board.

• Some further discussion of why the poor might be paying more than the rich for health care services is required. Such results are likely to reflect their greater need (and hence use). Without need-analysis (via concentration indices and similar) and using health status variables, it is too far stretched to jump to the conclusion that simply, the poor pay more than the rich.

• some parts on page 16 are caveats rather than discussions (about when the study was carried out, etc)

• The discussion on self medication (page 17) is not very well explained, because the finding that self medication is the first recourse for many/most is not new. the objective of the paper is not to analyse self medication.

• p 19 – ‘contrary to our expectations’…none of these expectations have been discussed at the beginning of the paper

• a more thoughtful conclusion would add to the paper

To answer the following:
1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   a. not very well

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   a. could do better; especially on robustness

3. Are the data sound?
   a. reasonably so – the sample size is very small, however, which may pose problems in checking results

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
a. on the whole yes, but each section still requires work

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
a. more required

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
a. they are somewhat scattered in the paper and could do with its own section

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
a. more recent literature must be drawn upon

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
a. more work required

9. Is the writing acceptable?
a. on the whole yes

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests