Reviewer's report

Title: A case study of outsourced primary healthcare services in Sindh, Pakistan: Is this a real reform?

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Reviewer: Peter Heywood

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting investigation of a serious question in many countries, not least Pakistan. The issue is how to improve health services under difficult circumstances where the public sector has funded and delivered services up to now. Overall, the quality of these services is low. Improving service quality is a major challenge. In the past there has tended to bias against using the non-government sector for these services with alleged lower quality (compared to the public sector) used as a central argument. This argument has been used even though there is little evidence to support it (see, for example, Berendes S et al (2011) Quality of private and public ambulatory health care in low and middle income countries: Systematic review of comparative studies. PLoS Med 8(4): e1000433. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000433.)

Major compulsory revisions.

Thus, a study which attempts to evaluate the effect of using a different model for delivering health services in the difficult situation found in Pakistan is welcome. The introductory section of the paper would be improved if the authors made reference to recent work that has compared quality of public and private care in low and middle income countries, such as the one referred to above.

As the main thrust of the paper is about quality of care it would help if there was a brief discussion of the components of care to be addressed in the study and this was then linked to methods used to obtain information.

The results section would be easier to understand if they were summarized in an extended Table 2. The extension could be in sections (rows) for each of the major components of care and, since the results are mainly qualitative, the entry in the table was a brief summary of the results for the two types of health facilities. For example, the additional rows in the table might be for staff numbers, staff salaries, availability of critical equipment, other infrastructure, patient load, distance travelled by patients, and so on.

Finally, without detracting from the usefulness of the study, it is important that the authors include a paragraph acknowledging the limitations of the study e.g. case study approach, limited numbers, unable to collect information on some variables, and so on.

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 no competing interests.