Author's response to reviews

Title: Monitoring the referral system through benchmarking in rural Niger: an evaluation of the functional relation between health centres and the district hospital

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The reviewers were only asking for minor changes. Under material and methods I changed the paragraph where the inclusion criteria for patients is discussed. I more explicitly stated that this exercise was concerning curative services. I also elaborated further on inclusion criteria by clearly stating that at risk women in antenatal care were not included, but pregnant women with overt pathology (e.g. bleeding placenta previa) were included as they could be considered as a curative patient. For the first time in the first paragraph under 'Materials and Methods' I was more clear by stating that the study concerned curative services. Elsewhere in the document I added this precision as well.

I come back on the problem of inclusion criteria page 7 in the discussion when saying a word on the under fives' clinics that do not detect malnutrition timely and that among other reasons this explains why malnutrition was hardly referred.

On the matter of stratification, page 5 under 'results' I gave % of children under five and % of females in the study population. Further details of stratification (detailed age groups and sex per age group) are less relevant for this study.

I adjusted the abstract and added conclusions as required by the format of the journal.