Reviewer's report

Title: Patients’ Dissatisfaction with the Public and Private Laboratory Services in Tanzania

Version: 1 Date: 14 December 2007

Reviewer: Wilson Pace

Reviewer's report:

Major revisions
No information on the response rate is included thus it is not possible to evaluate the representativeness of the responders. This is a concern both due to the sampling strategy (essentially a convenience sample) as well as the unknown information concerning non-responders. This information needs to be provided in the document as well as a rationale for the sampling approach. Also, the rationale for the small sample size per facility and overall small sample size given the number of sub-group analyses performed should be justified.

The results indicate there are differences in dissatisfaction levels in selected areas between private and public laboratories. Overall, the levels of dissatisfaction appear fairly high in a number of areas, (over 15% for 5 of 9 areas and over 20% for 3 areas) though the overall conclusion of the authors is that patients are satisfied with laboratory services. The reason for this conclusion should be better justified. The statement that responding to patient satisfaction concerns may be driving the "efficiency" of private labs does not seem to be supported by the results. Of the concepts that were studied only one appears to relate to "efficiency" - waiting time and this area had no differences between private and public labs. The other areas that were surveyed relate to customer service, but not really "efficiency."

This manuscript reports on patient satisfaction with laboratory services in Tanzania. The study evaluated patient satisfaction in both public and private laboratories. It appears the surveys were completed by interviews at each facility.

Minor Essential Revisions
The number of people interviewed per facility appears low per the methods 12 patients per facility on a first come basis. But, the average number of patients interviewed per facility is slightly over 12, thus it appears that more than 12 people were interviewed in some facilities. Please clarify the recruitment process.

The actual anchors are not reported on and all outcomes are reported as dichotomous either satisfied or dissatisfied. I suspect the actual anchors were actually a Likert like scale and the results collapsed into the reported outcomes. It would help with interpretation of the results by reporting on the actual anchors so that the data aggregation decision can be reviewed.
The concept of result notification is an area of high dissatisfaction in this survey. The results section indicates, indirectly, that this may be a provider factor instead of lab services factor. This area needs to be clarified as result notification is a problematic area in most health care systems, but may be outside the control of the laboratory. Thus, it is not clear how a satisfaction survey of this item can help improve lab services.

Of note, the reference to the Gadallah article is not actually in the reference list.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

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