Reviewer’s report

Title: Criteria-based audit to improve a district referral system in Malawi

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Reviewer: Robert Clive C Pattinson

Reviewer’s report:

Question well defined
Yes. The authors wanted to see if criteria-based audit could improve the referral system. The authors have examined a crucial aspect of the three delays and suggested a method of improving it.

Method appropriate
Yes. A simple before and after study was used for this study. The design obviously has the same weaknesses as other before and after studies. A randomised trial of intervention versus no intervention would have been better, but presumably the costs of doing such a study were beyond the authors.

Data sound and controlled
The data is well presented and clear. Simple, appropriate statistics were used.

Adhere to standards
Yes

Discussion and conclusion well balanced and supported by data
Yes. I think the authors could add to the article by examining the question of sustainability. The authors found a significant improvement in the referral system after 3 months. Is this the Hawthorne effect or has it been sustained. Secondly to make this process relevant to other countries with similar circumstances the authors could have mentioned the costs of getting the meeting together to agree on criteria.

Does title and abstract accurately convey what has been found
Yes

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