Reviewer's report

Title: Private and Public Health Care in Rural Areas of Uganda

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Reviewer: Barbara Isobel McPake

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My main objection to this paper is that it is not very original. The authors claim that ‘Access to health care has not been comprehensively studied in Uganda’, which I think requires considerable qualification.

There are lots of relevant studies that relate to this question and a recent systematic review, which the authors should have summarised and then gone on to explain how they see their contribution to the remaining gap. They leave the impression that no-one knows anything about their area of study whereas most of their findings are well known.

There have also been a series of National Household Surveys since the 1990s that include data on household health seeking behaviour. The authors do not explain why they thought it necessary to conduct an additional survey on a smaller scale on the same subject. There may be a compelling explanation but it is not provided. Many of the conclusions reached here could have been reached on the basis of analysis of the UNHS series.

The elements of the study which could offer more original insight are not well developed. There is material on traditional practitioners which has not been given attention in the access debate. However the data presented are somewhat contradictory - few people acknowledge using TPs but focus groups suggest that this may be because of stigma rather than low levels of use. It is not clear that the approach adopted - to consider them not really medical care - can be defended.

It is not always clear whether comments in the discussion section are conclusions from the study or from other studies - which indicates some of the problem of a lack of clarity in the gap this study is filling.