Author's response to reviews

Title: Use of traditional medicine for the treatment of diabetes mellitus in Eastern Uganda: a qualitative exploration of reasons for choice

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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The Editor,
BMC International Health and Human Rights

Dear Editor,

Re: Re-submission of the manuscript; Use of traditional medicine for the treatment of diabetes mellitus in Eastern Uganda: a qualitative exploration of reasons for choice MS ID: 1633867886121507

Please receive the revised version of the manuscript entitled: Use of traditional medicine for the treatment of diabetes mellitus in Eastern Uganda: a qualitative exploration of reasons for choice by Elizeus Rutebemberwa, Muhamadi Lubega, Sheila K Katureebe, Abanga Oundo, Francis Kiweewa and David Mukanga.

The following is the point-by-point response to the comments given:

Reviewer: Linda S. Kahn
Reviewer's report:
Define MANIFEST content analysis. What does manifest mean? Why not simply content analysis?

Manifest has been removed. It is now simply content analysis. This can be seen in the abstract last line of methods section in the paragraph on data management and analysis, third last line.

On page 6, minor edit: "The recording provided an accuracy that would not be OBTAINED [rather than "got"] from fieldnotes."

This has been changed from 'got' to 'obtained' as can be seen in the second line in the section on data management and analysis in the methods section.

Reviewer: Editor
"I have now had the opportunity to go through the revised manuscript. The subject is definitely an interesting and relevant one. The authors have definitely not addressed all the comments by the second reviewer. The paper could benefit from some serious editing by an experienced editor who is good with qualitative research. In its current state, the manuscript still has too many weaknesses. Just to mention a few:

-Page 3 10th line from bottom - suspected clients
Thank you for this comment. The word 'suspected' has been deleted

-page 4 para 1 orally glibenclamide

We thank the reviewers for this comment. The word orally has been deleted.
-Page 4 - the authors are already stating a reason why patients choose traditional medicine ie the influence of the traditional healers and their advertising strategies. We agree with the comment. This is not the place to start giving results. The influence of the traditional healers has been deleted in the sentence.

-Methods - why did they choose FGDs? Why couldn’t they look for people who had used traditional medicine in the past or present. We thank the editor for this comment. FGDs were used because they make the participants more relaxed as indicated on p.4, line 3 from the bottom. In addition, use of traditional medicine was a practice that was still stigmatized in Eastern Uganda as is explained in the methodological considerations after the discussion.

-Ref 19 - rich cases - would be those who would have used traditional medicine at some point. We thank the reviewer for this comment. As indicated above, use of traditional medicine is still looked down upon in the community and people do not easily come out to say that they use traditional medicine. During the FGDs, because FGDs make participants more relaxed, some people admitted having taken traditional herbs but as can also be seen from the quotes, participants used to talk of patients not coming in third person, the other. Sometimes they may be the very persons who used traditional herbs because of no transport etc but in the FGD, they have an opportunity to give information in third person which is a strength in using FGDs especially on topics that are still carry stigma.

-FGD sample questions included do not cover the important ones on reasons for using traditional medicine. We are grateful for this comment. This question was asked and we have included in the text the question on why patients use traditional medicine.

-Health worker sample questions do not cover why in their opinion people go for traditional medicine. We are again grateful for this comment. We have included the question on health workers’ opinion on why they go for traditional medicine.

-The individuals who collected data

- were they researchers or research assistants - the two terms are used interchangeably. We thank the reviewer for this comment. The individuals who collected the data were research assistants and this has been clearly stated.

-page 7 - results summary- what about influence by traditional healers
We thank the reviewer for this comment. The influence by the traditional healers has been added to the belief that traditional medicine cures because the continued use of traditional medicine is linked to influence from traditional healers.
Results - first quote: the patients should have already made the decision to go for traditional medicine. - the fact that the traditional healers force them to abandon hospital medicine. what we want to hear is the reason why they choose to go to the traditional healer.

We agree with the reviewer. The results have been re-arranged to give logic to the story. The reason patients go is that traditional medicine is accessible and affordable. This is coupled with the influence from the community members. However, once they are there, the continued use of traditional medicine is reinforced by the influence of traditional healers.

Last paragraph on Page 7 has little about belief that traditional medicine works and goes on to talk about stopping hospital medication and patients getting worse. We thank the reviewer for this. Stopping medication and patients getting worse has been removed. We have focused on the reasons why patients used traditional medicine.

Page 9 - last paragraph- what is the reason why the patients fail to get the medications. Is it because of stock outs????
As indicated in the section on study area, the hospitals faced frequent stock outs. That was the reason patients failed to get the medications. This can be seen in the sections on study area under methods.

Page 10 second paragraph - why take the two medications concurrently?
We thank the reviewer for this pertinent comment. The practice of taking traditional medicine and biomedical drugs is very common in Uganda and the neighbouring countries like Tanzania. It has even been elaborated as medical syncretism by MUELA, S. H., RIBERA, J. M., MUSHI, A. K. & TANNER, M. (2002) Medical syncretism with reference to malaria in a Tanzanian community. Soc Sci Med, 55, 403-13. Instances of taking traditional medicine have been recorded among women in labour etc. Personally, when serving as a medical officer in the district next to where this study was done, a midwife who was working with me in the same hospital when she was in labour intimated to me that she was taking traditional herbs as well the biomedical management yet she was in the hospital receiving good monitoring. She said she was taking traditional herbs because she did not want to take chances. It is something health workers get used to and accept as a way of life in managing patients. It is very common.

Page 11 - why should patients purchase if the drugs are available for free from the govt hospital? is it due to stock outs?
As indicated in the section on Study area, these hospitals as well as the other government hospitals in Uganda frequently lack drugs. Patients purchase because drugs are not available in the hospitals.

Overall, there was lack of direction, there was no probing during the FGDs and hence some of the quotations are not very relevant. My recommendation is that the
The manuscript is not yet ready for publishing. The authors need to do some work so as to refine the paper. Someone with experience in writing can assist the authors.

We thank the reviewer for this comment. The paper has been refocused. It only deals with reasons given for using traditional medicine. The results and discussion have been edited to reflect this. We have also contacted an editor who has as you will notice done a very extensive editing of the text. We are very appreciative of the editor’s work. He preferred not to be acknowledged.

We hope this meets the standards of your esteemed journal.