Reviewer's report

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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Reviewer: Linda S. Kahn

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

This article presents results of focus group discussions with diabetic patients and key informant interviews with health workers and herbalists in Eastern Uganda. The authors chose a fascinating and highly relevant research question: why patients might prefer "traditional" medicine dispensed by herbalists over "modern" medicine. However, substantive weaknesses in this paper preclude my recommending it for publication at this time.

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS

1. The authors contrast "traditional" medicine with "modern medicine" throughout the manuscript. However, traditional medicine is never clearly defined or delineated. I am curious as to which herbs healers are giving patients -- and which types of healing effects due to patients expect from these herbs? Do the herbs promote a sedating effect? Do the herbs suppress appetite? From an anthropological perspective the designation "modern" sounds ethnocentric. Perhaps the designation "modern" should be replaced with "allopathic" or "biomedical" or "Western." On page 2 the authors state: "Herbs have been reported as one of the remedies used for treatment by diabetic patients in Zimbabwe, Nigeria.... This is against the background [sic] that the efficacy of traditional herbs in the treatment of diabetes is still mixed." This statement suggests that there is some evidence that the herbs are efficacious.

2. There are also passages in the manuscript where the authors seem to be passing judgment: For example, the authors state: "People who get treatment from herbalists recruit others in the use of herbs. This leads them to abscond from [sic] getting modern treatment from hospitals." Yet, based on the healthcare system described in this manuscript, there are compelling and rational reasons for patients to seek alternative treatment.

3. The authors note that inadequacies of the healthcare system contribute to patients' preference for alternative medicine/herbs. The authors tie their findings to "Andersen’s model." They state early in the manuscript, on page 6, that "Andersen's model was used in the analysis." However, they never define or explain this model and how it was used.
4. Further description of the healthcare system would also be helpful -- including whether patients have insurance to cover the cost of "modern medicine." If patients have to pay out-of-pocket for glyburide or other diabetes medications, this may have a profound impact on their decision to use traditional medicine/herbs that may supersede community influence. Incidentally, the impact of culture is never mentioned.

5. In the methodology section, the authors need to explain specifically how the patients were recruited. On page 5, paragraph 1 they state: "Four FGSs were conducted with diabetic patients..." Here they should indicate the total number of patients. A table of participants would be helpful -- listing the total numbers for each group (focus groups and key informant interviews) as well as corresponding demographic information.

6. The organization of the results is confusing. Patient focus group results are mixed together with key interview results with health workers and herbalists. One suggestion would be to present each group separately, highlighting themes in common and then tie it all together in the Discussion. Another suggestion would be to keep the present organization of the with the themes, but put subheadings underneath each theme designating the specific group (e.g., patient focus groups etc.).

7. Finally, this manuscript needs a good English editor. There is awkward and grammatically incorrect phrasing throughout.

**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 that I have no competing interests’