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: Katarina Hjelm

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper however, there are limitations particularly concerning the literature that the study is based on, the methods and analysis made and thus, also concerning conclusions drawn. There is also a lack of presentation of the characteristics of the studied population.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   There is a lack of references to studies in the introduction supporting that ‘…there has been an increase in DM patients’ use of other complimentary/traditional herbs especially in resource poor settings’. This is also evident for the statement ‘There is not much literature on why diabetic patients keep using herbs for managing DM in African countries’

   There is also an incongruence between title ‘….reasons for choice.’ and abstract ‘…why the diabetic patients keep using traditional medicine for the treatment of DM’ and the aim of the study ‘to explore why the diabetic patients keep using traditional medicine..'which is two different things and further, it assumes that they are using it and then continue ?! Neither do the Results part support this.

   It need to be clarified what the question posed is and based on the literature and then logically investigate and answer it.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   What design was used in the study and why?
   Is it a mix of Focus-group interviews and individual interviews with key informants? This is not clear.
   How was sample size determined? Why one group from each hospital? How many participated in total in the study and in each FG?
   Why investigating health workers, what do they know about the studied topic? Key informants?!
   What interview questions where used?
   One important matter as concerns credibility is the competence of the investigator, what do we know about those interviewing? Language? Interpretation of and rigour?
   Thus, there is a lot of unanswered questions in here and there is a lack of referencing to methodological literature on Focus-group interviews (e.g Krueger
& Casey or Morgan)and description of the methods main characteristic.

Rigour?! How do we know that data is not subjectively interpreted?

However, the weakest part in this section is the analysis of data which need to be clearly described (including example of the process), based on appropriate methodological literature, and telling what kind of content analysis that have been made. Further, no information is given about what Andersen’s model concerns.

What is also lacking in this section is a description of the study populations characteristics which are important when considering the results, its values and transferability of data.

3. Are the data sound?
The main question is whether they answer the posed question and thus the aim?! See under 1.

Overlapping between content e.g under “Belief that trad med is curative” and “Influence from family and friends”.

Under “Easy access to traditional medicine” it is hard to find the patients reasons for using it, seems to be focused on herbalists and hc staff mainly!?

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

See above.

Does the quotations support the themes stated? E.g ‘Belief that traditional medicine is curative’ the text says one thing and the quotation another!?!...

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

When reading the data it gives a picture that patients stop using trad medicine as it worsens their condition but this is not what you find in the discussion, congruence?! Supporting of data?!

Last paragraph under Discussion and last sentence “They should understand the reason why they eat before taking drugs…” necessary in relation to the studied topic? Necessary in relation to knowledge about medications?

Conclusions then, goes too far beyond what can be concluded from a qualitative study.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

Limitations of using focus-groups? Would other results have been gained with other data collection methods, e.g individual in-depth interviews? Isn’t it possible to get the true ‘views from the diabetic patients who had abandoned the modern treatment for the traditional medicine’?
Can you talk about representativity in a qualitative study?

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

See under 1 and 2 above about references lacking.

Page 5 reference 27 – the content is wrongly cited as this article neither uses nor discusses the focus-group technique!!!

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Title ok but not in congruence with aim of the study, see above under 1.

Abstract could be changed with reducing methods and increasing results part.

9. Is the writing acceptable?

Language is in general good.

Reference list need to be corrected so that all information is included and et al deleted.

Figure 1 – in the text there is no text referring to it! Where should it be placed???

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