Reviewer's report

Title: Experiences of leadership in health care in sub-Saharan Africa: a qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 21 September 2011

Reviewer: Barbara Stilwell

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Essential revisions: 1. while the qualitative analysis techniques are familiar to the researchers they are difficult to follow and the paper would benefit from briefly expanding on, for example, what is 'constant comparative method'. Some of the writing comes across as a bit jargon-ridden and it might be difficult for readers to understand at first read - for example, 'tending to relationships' - does that mean paying attention to them or leaning towards having them?.

2. It would strengthen the paper to have a table of frequency of responses, if this was what resulted in the five key themes. I remained unclear whether these were the result of the analysts consensus or based on frequency, or some other measure.

3. Some key terms need explanation - 'finding things 'important' is one example - how was important defined? Did respondents say things were important?Looking at the discussion questions, I am wondering how this idea of 'importance' emerged? Was that the researchers' interpretation?

Suggested revisions, but not essential: I think these findings could have some implications for issues of governance, and I wonder whether you have considered relating them. So for example, the emphasis on relationships may relate to trust, which is known to be important in networking and influencing. So how does trust relate to good governance and relationships? Even if you do not expand on this theme it is important enough to get a mention.

Secondly, there are important implications in these findings for developing leadership skills and you mention the challenges of developing relationship skills - very important. Do you have any insights into how the respondents did develop these skills? Could we learn about how to develop these skills in others?

Thirdly, how did you define leadership? Was it those who were in positions in which they would have to lead (i.e. related to a hierarchy)? Or self-defined? Or defined by others? This would help us to understand what you are understanding by leadership!

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a
Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interestst to declare.