Reviewer's report

Title: Postoperative outcome of caesarean sections and other major emergency obstetric surgery by clinical officers and medical officers in Malawi.

Version: Date: 21 February 2007

Reviewer: Jerker Liljestrand

Reviewer's report:

General

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

MY SUGGESTION ARE FOR A FEW, CRITICAL AND LIMITED REVISIONS, AS GIVEN [Below]

CS in Malawi, peer review

This is an important and interesting paper on a prospective study of CS in Malawi, with focus on the background of the operator. It is will written, and quite timely in view of the human resource crisis in SSA, and the experiences of major surgery by non-doctors in other African countries.

A few points for possible modification:
1. The study covers all government and Christian district hospitals in Malawi but evidently excludes referral hospitals. It would be good to get some sense of how big a proportion of all CSs in the country that are carried out by non-doctors; or, bar this, at least know how many higher units were excluded from the study.
2. Even though the table is fully explanatory on where internship was performed, the text on this topic is a bit difficult to follow. “Of the operations (n=256)…were done by MOs who did their internship at the central hospital”. Is this “had done” or “were doing”? Pls clarify.
3. The whole discussion on internship could be pursued a bit further. What would be the conscious recommendation of the authors as regards internship, in view the findings?
4. In this context, it could be valuable to briefly discuss the issue of pre-operative diagnosis, ie is there any reason to believe that COs have less skills than MOs in this regard?
5. Some of the CSs were elective, while te majority of the operations apparently were emergency operations. This could be spelled out somewhere.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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 statistician.