Reviewer's report

Title: Scaling up of comprehensive EmOC services in rural Tanzania using non-physician clinicians

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Reviewer: Helen de Pinho

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Major Compulsory Revisions and Comments:
These comments and suggestions are based on the questions provided by the HRH editors.

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
The authors need to clearly articulate a research question.

The increased use of NPCs to expand access to Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric Care is certainly an important area of interest in the field, and there is a clear need to assess innovative training programmes necessary to expand access to CEmOC, including anesthesia particularly by NPCs. However this manuscript only describes the introduction of a 3 month training module for Assistant Medical Officers, and fails to articulate a specific research question related to this training programme. There are a number of key questions that could have been developed into research questions including for example:

• What value does this new training intervention add to what is currently existing in pre-service education? Does this new 3 month training intervention result in better practice/quality of care compared to current training received for CEmOC and anesthesia?

• Does the new 3 month training programme better address workplace needs compared to current training?

• Using a simple before / after design is the new training programme a better means of developing competencies compared to existing training programmes?

• What are the lessons learnt from the introduction of a 3 months training programme? (more of a case study than a research project)

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
The manuscript simply describes the training programme and does not describe any research methods. In the absence of a clearly articulated research question it is difficult to assess the appropriateness of the methods.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled? No. No specific research data were collected. It appears that the only data presented in the manuscript were routine/programme data from the records of the training programme.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? (see response to question 3)

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? The lack of a research question and scientific research method limits the conclusions that can justifiably be drawn from the data. E.g. no data is provided to support the claim that “there is no doubt that the training programs have improved the knowledge and clinical management” and nor is there evidence to support that this will translate into maternal mortality reduction.

The authors claim that this training has “strengthened the human resources for provision of CEmOC services “ a conclusion based on the exposure of the AMOS to a CEmOC training programme. However, the authors also indicate that for many of the CEmOC skills – the trainees did not successfully complete the required number of procedures and the reader is left wondering about the competency of the AMO to perform the full set of CEmOC signal functions (other than caesarean sections). Claims about quality of care are also not adequately backed up by the data provided.

In their final conclusion, it is an oversimplification to equate training programmes with a scale up of “task shifting”. It would be useful for the authors to consider all the other enabling elements necessary to support task shifting e.g. regulation, ongoing supervision and quality monitoring, and ensuring adequately health facility infrastructure, drugs and supplies.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? The title is misleading as the paper focuses on a single intervention (a 3 months training programme) and does not consider all the elements necessary to be in place in order to scale up access to comprehensive EmOC.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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'