Reviewer's report

Title: Advancing the application of systems thinking in health: exploring dual practice and its management in Kampala, Uganda

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Reviewer: Irene Akua Agyepong

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
   a. Questions posed by the authors are interesting and relevant and provide a new perspective on the issue by applying a systems thinking lense
   b. I think however that the authors could improve the clarity with which they pose the question. This would then affect the way the manuscript is presented. Specifically my understanding is that the question they are asking are posed/framed on page 3, the last paragraph. The first sentence there provides the more descriptive part of the question i.e. “how dual practice evolved and how it is currently managed in the Ugandan health system with and active private sector”. The second sentence in that paragraph would belong under methodology in my opinion – and should be moved there to give a consistent logical flow to the presentation. The next sentences after the first sentence should provide the “why” part of the questions and I think will make the work more interesting if re-phrased from that perspective. Thus about from the “what” more descriptive question of the first sentence, there would be a more explicitly analytical “why” question stated e.g. “why dual practice has evolved and is being managed the way it is in the Ugandan health system”
   c. Finally the last parts of framing of the research question should remain as currently an expression of the usefulness of asking these questions e.g. ….knowledge to help build the science and the field but also knowledge to help policy makers and health managers optimize managing dual practice and its consequences
   d. I would suggest leaving the bit about “rules” out of the last sentence. I think rules are only a part of the whole – and the paper itself clearly shows that the optimizing and managing are being done by a combination of formal and informal processes. Otherwise then modify the sentence to talk about rules and other processes and procedures to optimize managing dual practice and its consequences

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

Yes, but think there can be some tightening of the write up to eliminate repetitions
3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

Yes. However presentation could perhaps be improved. Think once the study questions presentation has been sharpened may be useful to relook at presenting the data in a way that clearly follows the questions asked.

Especially to organize the presentation better around answering the “what” question and answering the “why” question

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

Okay

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

Discussion is too focused on the descriptive and does not adequate provide more analysis around the “why” of the findings, and also issues around the relevance to researchers and the relevance to decision makers in Uganda and beyond. Some of the discussion is repeating findings. Makes the paper longer than it could be. Will need a careful checking process to eliminate these overlaps and tighten the discussion. Discussion will need to be restructured once the study questions have been sharpened as suggested

Draw out more strongly the lessons for the health system in Uganda and other countries struggling with similar issues.

Link the discussion better to some of the issues raised in the introduction. The issues are there but a clearer link will be more reader friendly

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

Yes

7. Is the writing acceptable?

Yes

**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.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests