Reviewer's report

Title: Adaptation of a probabilistic method (InterVA) of verbal autopsy to improve the interpretation of cause of stillbirth and neonatal death in Malawi, Nepal and Zimbabwe

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Reviewer: Daniel DC Chandramohan

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Major comments:
1. In the discussion the authors claim that an absolute gold standard for validation of VA methods including interVA does not exist. I agree that there are several limitations in using hospital deaths with confirmative diagnosis as the gold standard. However, using VA diagnosis based on physician review as gold standard has more problems than hospital based deaths. The justification of using physician review of VA as the comparator and the caveats of this comparison should be discussed thoroughly.

2. The authors acknowledge that the VA data collection process has a huge impact on the validity of the VA diagnosis. As they point out that observed similarity in CSMF between Malawi and Nepal is more likely due to the consistency in the data collection in these two sites. One would expect the CSMF in Malawi and Zimbabwe to be more similar than that between Malawi and Nepal. Is this difference in CSMF between Malawi and Zimbabwe real or methodological artefact? The authors have not discussed this issue in detail and have not given any convincing explanation for this difference in CSMF.

3. The paper can be shortened substantially particularly the discussion is too long and not focussed on the data presented.

Minor comments

1. The strengths of interVA method are repeated in the introduction and discussion. The discussion of strengths of the value of interVA method should be restricted to the aspects supported by the data presented in this paper.

2. The figures 2,3 and 4 can be dropped and the data can be presented in a single table.

3. Data shown in figures 5 and 6 would be easy to understand if presented in tables.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.