Author's response to reviews

Title: The effects of dictatorship on health: the case of Turkmenistan

Authors:

Bernd Rechel (bernd.rechel@lshtm.ac.uk)
Martin McKee (martin.mckee@lshtm.ac.uk)

Version: Date: 20 February 2007

Author's response to reviews:

Thank you very much for reviewing our submission. We are very grateful to the reviewers for their valuable and constructive comments.

We have taken account of the comments of the reviewers and also taken the opportunity to comprehensively update the manuscript, making use of the websites suggested by the reviewers, and of a large number of other sources of information. The manuscript now reflects the situation in Turkmenistan in February 2007.

We would be most grateful if you could reconsider the manuscript for publication in your journal.

Yours sincerely

Prof Martin McKee

Points raised by the editors
Methods section
We have expanded the methods section and clarified how the manuscript expands on and updates the previous publication.

This paper brings the earlier findings up-to-date, focusing on three key areas in which the dictatorship has an impact on health in Turkmenistan: the policy of secrecy and denial, the complicity in drug trafficking, and the neglect of the health care sector. For this update, we have made a comprehensive search of publicly available sources in February 2007. A search was conducted of PubMed/Medline, Google, and Google Scholar, using the word Turkmenistan with a range of health-related terms, with follow up of leads generated. In addition, a search of relevant websites was undertaken, including UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and news agencies (such as EurasiaNet, IRIN News, and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting). The paper is now up to date as of February 2007.

Other issues
The copyright of the report is held by LSHTM, delegated to the authors. Thus we are in a position to grant the right to publish the updated version of the report and we have included the link to the original report in the reference section.

Points raised by Carlos Alvarez-Dardet and Tomas Pascual
Introduction
We have shortened the section on the political context and included a new section on the socioeconomic context.
References
We have comprehensively updated the references, including any websites given.

Points raised by Ted Tulchinsky
Abstract background
We have introduced the distinction suggested, between the health crisis that is similar but more severe than in other Central Asian countries, and the existence of a dictatorship in Turkmenistan. We have also stated a hypothesis about the impact of the dictatorship on health in Turkmenistan and used the results of our study to accept or reject the hypothesis.
Results section
We have made it clearer which data the Turkmen authorities continued to report to international agencies.
and updated the manuscript with available data.

We have couched the findings in more moderate terminology.

We have taken account of the reports suggested to provide a more comprehensive picture of health reforms in the country, setting them in the context of efforts in other countries of the region. We have in particular taken note of the reports by UNICEF and USAID and integrated them in the manuscript.