Reviewer's report

Title: Maternal and Perinatal Health Research Priorities beyond 2015: an international survey and prioritization exercise

Version: 1 Date: 19 February 2014

Reviewer: Jill Durocher

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Major Compulsory Revisions: None

Minor Essential Revisions:

In the Discussion section:

-- The first and third paragraphs highlight that the research questions mainly focus on ‘Implementation research of existing effective interventions,’ yet there is no mention of what these existing interventions include. At minimum, I would suggest giving a few examples…

-- Training and awareness – recurring theme that deserves more prominence in conclusions (including in the abstract)

--When looking at the top 20 questions, cost-effectiveness seems to be a recurring theme. This could be elaborated on in the Discussion.

-- In the third paragraph of the Discussion, it says “It is no surprise that priority questions focused on the implementation/delivery of known interventions…Health systems research had the second most research questions…” Can the authors expand on this and offer their theories about why this is now the focus? Are these research priorities the same or different from the research priorities of the previous decade? Is this more of the same or are we at a different juncture?

Discretionary Revisions:

1. In the second paragraph of the Background section, it would be useful to include a citation in support of the statement, “Despite this relatively slow progress, it is widely believed that the interventions needed to reduce MMR….already exist.”

2. In the Methods section (paragraph two, last sentence), it seems that recent Cochrane reviews could have also been consulted for developing a list of research questions. Was this considered?

Perhaps the lack of science discovery questions could be attributed to the selective processes that were undertaken for identifying additional research questions.
3. In the Results section, it would be helpful to know more about the stakeholders/researchers that participated in this exercise. Could you provide a breakdown of researchers vs. program managers vs. policy makers vs. donors, etc? Proportion of participants from developed vs. developing countries?

Given that this is the largest exercise for research prioritization, involving a very large group of participants (as described in the Discussion), it seems important to discuss the composition of this group in greater detail.

Any information that would suggest varying research priorities by participant type?

4. Last paragraph of Results section: Suggest replacing HDP with ‘hypertensive disorders of pregnancy’ for easier reading of paper.

5. With regard to the Discussion of the discovery questions (or lack of), an additional explanation is that some stakeholders are simply not aware of some of the new technologies that are in earlier phases of development/exploration. Thus, when asked to list research questions, they tend to focus on the technologies that they know about.

Furthermore, the goal of this exercise was described as “to identify research questions with the potential to have an impact between 2015 and 2025” (second sentence of Methods). Was this goal/timeframe shared with the participants? If so, then it would make sense why so few questions were discovery questions. I would suggest clarifying this point in the methods/discussion.

I also wonder if current funding streams (i.e. abortion or FP-related research) influence responses in this exercise. This could be added to the discussion.

6. Themes vs. Top priority questions (table 1 vs. table 2): I was curious to see that the terms ‘prevention’ and ‘treatment’ were not included as themes under “Obstetric Hemorrhage” and “Hypertensive Disorders of Pregnancy” (prevention is included under HDP). Yet, the priority research questions under Table 2 include these terms ‘prevent’ and ‘treat’ in reference to hemorrhage. Were these terms not commonly found in participants’ responses?

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest 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.