Reviewer’s report

Title: The growth of a culture of evidence-based obstetrics in South Africa: a qualitative case study

Version: 1 Date: 3 February 2011

Reviewer: Mathieu Ouimet

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Minor essential revisions

On page 3, the authors write that "a randomized controlled trial across two country settings showed, however, that even after active dissemination and promotion of the RHL at hospital level, consistent or substantive changes to clinical practices were not detected. In other words, evidence based practice had not increased." These statements are based on the results of one RCT (reference #6). At the end of the trial, the authors present different reasons that might explain their non-significant results. Based on the small sample size and on other characteristics of this trial, I am not convinced that "evidence based practiced had not increased" is a justifiable statement. Moreover, EBM people would generally say that it is just one primary study with some risks of bias. In other words, I do not think that one, single RCT can be considered as a "crucial" experiment.

On page 3, second paragraph, the authors quote (ref. 19 and 20) two existing systematic reviews. The most recent, the one of Lavis et al., was published in 2005 (more than five years ago). I do not ask the author to update this review, but only to search for more recent empirical primary studies that could have documented facilitators of research use that were not reported in these outdated reviews.

Page 16, second paragraph: "A second limitation is that we only interviewed a limited number of the most senior members of the obstetric and gynaecology fraternity since they were key figures in policy development". To me, it could be a MAJOR limitation of the study. In interviewing less popular people, the results might have been different. This selection bias might invalidate parts of the findings and might explain the positive tone of the article. I am of those who believe that negative findings can sometimes be more valuable than positive ones to advance knowledge. The positive feedbacks received during the interviews may be due to a selection bias or may reflect the "reality" as well. Perhaps these possibilities should be made more explicit in the revised version.

Discretionary Revisions

Page 4, second paragraph: Please, avoid statements like "the findings reported here “tell the story” of the development..."
Page 4, first paragraph: "While the factors affecting the translation of research...". I would rather write "...the factors associated with the translation"...

Page 7, third paragraph: "The concept of evidence-based medicine became embedded in South African academic obstetrics at a very early stage in relation to the development of the concept internationally". Please, be more specific.

Page 13, third paragraph: "The success with which a culture of evidence-based medicine spread within senior obstetrics networks in South Africa stands in sharp contrast to the literature describing a lack of access to and awareness of evidence in many LMICs". Perhaps this is due to variations in the objectives, focus and methods found in the quoted studies.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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