Reviewer’s report

Title: An intervention to improve paediatric and newborn care in Kenyan district hospitals: Understanding the context

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Reviewer: Martin McKee

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This is one of those very rare papers that causes this reader to take a sharp intake of breath. The travel writer Dervla Murphy once said of a health facility she visited in Pakistan “this was not a hospital, it was a statistic”. So often we simply accept labels, not questioning what they actually mean. Yet the messiness that the authors describe so carefully should serve as a major caution to those who so easily play fast and loose with statistics on, for example, health provision. The diversity documented is quite remarkable and the constraints faced by those seeking to improve quality are staggering, especially the scale of staff turnover.

This approach can be viewed in the light of a growing body of research that seeks to understand context, especially with regard to health determinants (for example, the “broken window index” as a measure of community cohesiveness.

I have only two very minor (discretionary) suggestions.

1. First, I would like to see a more in-depth discussion of the implications for their research, especially given the high turnover. What measures might be used to address this problem?

2. Second, I feel that the authors have developed a very useful tool that could be used in other settings. I would like to see them discuss how this might be taken forward and, accepting the many difficulties involved, how they might make use of it in the future.


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