Author’s response to reviews

Title: A health systems strengthening intervention to improve quality of care for sick and small newborn infants: results from an evaluation in district hospitals in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

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Thank you for your comments

This was a large cross sectional study commissioned by the KZN Department of Health and undertaken in partnership with the Department of Health to review routine care provided in neonatal units in KwaZulu-Natal. The aim of this work was to identify gaps in care provided to newborns, so that these gaps could be addressed.

We received full ethical approval from the University Biomedical Research Ethics Committee (BE177/13), and we also obtained ethical approval from the Department of Health Research & Knowledge Management Committee (HRKM 085/13). We had strong support from the chief paediatrician for KZN, Dr Neil McKerrow, who is an author on this paper and who led the process of reviewing quality of care in district hospital nurseries. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of every hospital gave permission for the study to review the routine care undertaken in the respective hospitals’ neonatal nursery.

All the data collected related to care provided on the day of the visit. Data was collected by a field worker, largely by observation of service provision. No infants or parents were questioned in any way. Health workers were requested to complete a self-administered knowledge questionnaire and leave it for researchers to collect later. The purpose of this was to identify areas where knowledge was inadequate and additional skills development was required. Completion of these questionnaires was voluntary and no identifying information was collected, but since this was deemed to be part of the routine duties of these health workers, no specific consent was requested.