Reviewer’s report

Title: Research Partnerships Between Developing and Developed Countries: Are Global Partnerships Always a Good Thing?

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Reviewer: Solomon (Solly) Benatar

Reviewer’s report:

This work is not significantly novel and provides only minimal novel insights. As the authors have not (in this reviewer’s view) grasped the essential difference between international health and global health, their arguments are not as strong as they could be, and their case is inadequately argued.

Although reasonably well referenced the article does not adequately reflect some of the important content of several references (for example references 21 and 34), and the authors do not seem to be familiar with the work of Alex London and Jim Lavery on research in ‘developing countries.’

The article does, however, address an important problem of interest to a broad biomedical audience and it is written well enough for publication.

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The authors need to understand the difference between international health and global health. In the absence of so doing this article is about international health research partnerships and the word global should be changed to international in the title, and in lines 38, 47, 52, 150, 162, 237, 251. Use of the term “Global Health” (in parenthesis) on line 57 is OK as it is being used there as a replacement for the term international health with no real change in meaning.

Use of the terms developed and developing world is increasingly becoming passé. The term refers mainly to levels of economic development. There is much more to development than economic growth. High, middle and low-income countries is a better way to refer to wealth status. It is arguable that many wealthy countries are under-developed in many ways and that all countries need ongoing development in some aspects of their progress. (See Bensimon CM Benatar SR. Developing sustainability: a new metaphor for progress. Theor Med Bioeth. 2006;27(1):59-79.) Alex London and Jim Lavery have made important contributions to research in poor countries, in particular relating to exploitation and the need for community engagement to ensure equity in benefits.

My impression of this article is that it is written by very well intentioned clinicians, who do not have an adequate educational background in ethics or the ethics of international research. Their frame of reference remains somewhat paternalistic and self-interested (at least from their country’s perspective).
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: No conflicts of interest