Reviewer’s report

Title: User experiences with clinical social franchising: Qualitative insights from providers and clients in Ghana and Kenya

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Reviewer: Sohail Agha

Reviewer’s report:

This is a very useful report and summarizes a lot of the learning from franchises which franchise practitioners are well aware of but has not necessarily been penned down systematically.

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS

While the authors make it very clear that benefits to the clients of visiting franchised private providers are related to better quality services in terms of provider attentiveness the study does not demonstrate that this greater attentiveness is due to the training provided by franchisors. Indeed, the reason that providers appear to be interested in being part of a franchise appears to be driven by their interest in being more attentive to clients. There is likely a strong selection factor at work which should be mentioned.

Clients who visit functioning private sector facilities often do so because provider attentiveness is better than at public sector facilities. There are several studies which show this, including some cited by the authors. I believe that clients are going to give quality of care as a reason for visiting such private provider. Franchising may or may not have anything to do with it. Being part of a franchise indicates a private providers interest in treating their clients better and in providing better quality services. More than that, it seems to me, is difficult to say.

I believe that the above points should be addressed by the authors.

Another important point that cannot be ignored is that the original purpose of franchising was to improve the quality of clinical care available through the private sector. There is no evidence to suggest that clinical care has improved in the franchises that have been working for many years. In the case of some well known franchises, including several in Pakistan, the quality of clinical care is known to be very poor.

It is not clear whether that the investment being made in franchising is resulting in more than a good feeling for the clients. Not to say that the feel good effect is not important (it can lead to better compliance) but is it enough for the amount of money being invested in franchising? This issue should be addressed in some way. There are now more than 80 franchise networks (as stated by the authors). The investment must be substantial. What do we have to show for it in terms of health impact?
Many of the points that I have raised could be addressed in the discussion section. Overall, this is an excellent paper and adds much to the literature.

My congratulations to the authors for an extremely pertinent and well written report.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance 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 worked for a social marketing organization for many years. This organization was involved in social franchising. I do not know how this article will or if it will affect their interests.