Reviewer's report

Title: Understanding the modifiable health systems barriers to hypertension management in Malaysia: a multi-method health systems appraisal approach

Version: 3
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Reviewer: Lijing Yan

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript used a mixed-method approach to better understand the modifiable health systems barriers to hypertension management in Malaysia. The main purpose was to inform the design of a complex pragmatic trial (HOPE-4) but the methods and messages from this work are useful for other countries and studies as well. The authors should be applauded for carefully conducting such a study, which is much needed but usually not done in other trials. In general, the paper is well written with a sound methodology and clear theoretical framework for this type of studies. However, there are major and minor revisions needed to make it suitable for publication.

Major:

1. Line 208: Table 2 is helpful, but more details are needed in this section on how the interviewees were selected, who conducted the interviews (trialists or independent interviewers), length of interviews etc.
2. Line 228: details need to be provided for how the triangulation was done.
3. This reviewer finds the RESULTS section to be confusing to read with results from other studies and published data sources (eg. Lines 282-3; 375-7) together with results from the field interviews. It would be better to report them separately;
4. The methods section and discussion sections are better written (concise and clear) while the results section is less clear, usually a compilation of statements and rather long; there is a disconnect in the framework and the description of results too.
5. Tables: tables 3 and 4 are not suitable as tables, better to be appendices if authors feel necessary to have such information. Table 5 is good (but only an adaptation of previous paper); if the Results section can summarize findings relevant to Malaysia from the study (esp. the field interviews) into a tabular format like Table 5, it will make the paper more reader-friendly.
6. The paper is TOO long and has too many tables and figures even if the journal does not have specific requirements.

Minor

1. Use of acronyms bothersome: too many, lack of definitions before first use for some (eg, line 111), and inconsistent use throughout the manuscript.
2. Line 254: remove the before there.
3. Line 314: not clear who are they: MO?
4. Line 315: “take their word” quotes not clear (who said what about whose word)?
5. Line 429: revise use of ( ).
6. Line 641: within and without the health system: choice of term “without” better to be “outside” or external to.

**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 know several authors in the list (DB, JDS, SY) and I currently work with one of the co-authors (JDS) on a pilot project.