Title: Endurance, resistance and resilience in the South African health care system: case studies to demonstrate mechanisms of coping within a dysfunctional system

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Author's response to reviews:

Dear Editors,

We apologise for not responding fully to the very helpful comments provided by the reviewers. In this letter, we address their comments more thoroughly as requested in your email of June 23, 2015. The lines referred to in this letter to changes are those in the attached version of the text, however those referenced by referees refer to the older version.

Referee 1, Dr. Pfeiffer:

Minor revisions:

In editing the text, we have removed the references on lines 182 and 185. The references on 202 and 203 have been added and incorporated into the reference list. The reference to ‘incredible resilience’ on line 387 was taken out.

Major revisions:

Theoretical framework:

We have clarified the definition of terms on line 143 and used the Obrist et al paper on line 156 to strengthen the theoretical framework. The concerns regarding the type of resources on line 216 have been addressed in the attached version from line 150.

Methodology:

We have more fully described the data collection process starting from line 196.

Results:

Resource mobilisation has been clarified using subheadings linking the cases to
resistance and resilience on lines 266, 335, 399, and 474.

In terms of the terminological issue on line 464, this is a coincidence of terms, as Sthembiso shows resilience in terms of her labour pains by describing her coping (line 312 in the new version).

We have addressed the limitations of our work from line 603.

Referee 2, Dr. Leon:

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. We have changed the formatting of the article and balanced the sections to better reflect the standard for BMC Health Services Research articles

2. We have changed the word ‘challenging’ in the title to ‘dysfunctional’ as we agree the paper does not talk about transformation.

3. To simplify and clarify, we have removed ‘comparative’ from the title as the paper reflects on different case studies as emerges in the discussion and conclusion.

4. We have reduced the background to ensure the relevance of our work.

5. We have reduced quoting in the background and methods sections extensively. We have removed material from the background on the health care system in South Africa, the nature of the health workforce in South Africa, health planning and reform, and patient characteristics and experiences in the system. We have rewritten the section on agency and resources. We have removed our discussion of the broad theories of resilience and coping in order to emphasise the key questions which our work addresses. In the methods section we have removed the background on narrative analysis and case stories.

6. In answering 5, we have identified the areas of interest (endurance, resilience, resistance, and coping) and succinctly stated what is known, where advances can be made in research, and placed our research question in relation to advancing knowledge.

7. In reducing the text in the background and methods, the writing style has become more directed and succinct to answer our questions, allowing our voice and the voices of our participants to be heard.

8. We have linked the discussion to the background by emphasising in the former resistance and resilience as well as resources and coping (see lines 539, 553, and 595 onward).

9. We have retained the supporting narratives and continue to feel these add value to the more focused discussion.

10. Lines 196-207 provide a fuller description of data collection, the researchers and research strategy, and sampling.
11. Line 216 shows our revised analytical framework. We have also removed the detail on narrative analysis and case stories from the methods section.

12. We have emphasised coping in the theoretical section, linking it to endurance, resilience, and resistance between lines 130 and 143.

13. We have added subtitles to our selected cases to show how they add elements of the core concepts of coping, endurance, resistance, and resilience.

We hope that this provides what you required.

Sincerely,

The Authors