Reviewer’s report

Title: Qualitative Analysis of National Documents on Health Care Services and Pharmaceuticals’ Purchasing Challenges: Evidence from Iran

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Reviewer: Susanne Kaae

Reviewer's report:

Overall impression

The paper regards an important topic - optimal coordination and use (payment) of health services. Unfortunately I find the paper quite difficult to understand partly because of the language (very long sentences with special definitions of a number of concepts often unknown to the reader), partly because of the very broad topic of the paper (which covers all process in the health care system) and because some fundamental issues such as a description of the basic mechanisms of the Iranian health care system is lacking as well as details about how the analysis is carried out. Perhaps the authors should consider to divide the manuscript in two - as they are many things to explain. Right now the authors want to include everything which makes the explanations superficial and difficult to understand. I further think the language of manuscript should be scrutinized by a professional.

(Title and) abstract

I wonder if the authors could find another verb than purchasing to cover the content and the analyses done - and rather use a range of terms: prioritizing, coordinating etc. to better illustrate for the reader the aim and the content of the paper. This issue goes for the entire article. Perhaps you could mention how many documents were included in the analysis

Background: I find the first two sentences difficult to understand (line 75-78) - partly again because of the use 'purchase' but also what does ‘accumulated income in financial fund’ mean?

Line 82 - could you provide an example of what strategic purchasing might be?

Line 88-91 - could you explain in more basic language what this section means?

Line 92-94 - You write that in some countries providers are separated from other organizations such as governmental - what are the positive or negative effects of such a relationship?

Line 95-98 - can you re-write the paragraph - I simply don´t understand it
Can you provide some information about the basic organization of health services provision and funding behind it in Iran right now (including the system of health insurance and how many Iranians are covered by which type of health insurance) - otherwise it’s very difficult to understand the paper (there is a bit in line 99-100 - but more is needed)

Line 102-105 - please rewrite the paragraph - I don´t understand it

Line 107-110 - can you explicate what the exact problems are with insurance companies briefly mentioned in this paragraph

Line 113 - why is an increase of number of service providers based on training additional human sources a problem and what does training additional human sources mean?

115 - what does lack of service integrity in different treatment levels refer to? - and likewise line 121 what is the problem with the insurance coverage?

Line 133-139 - could the sentence be shortened and content clarified - for example - what does 'drug section' refers to?

Methods

Line 161-169 - please specify how you think the selected types of formal documents can lead you to identify present challenges in the health care system? (a law for example may explain the system but does not say which challenges a certain system encounters in practice!)

Line 182 - should it be 'insurance companies' instead of 'insurances'?

Line 193-194 - what is meant by 'personal and organizational benefit' - and why could these types of documents not be included in the analysis?

Line 210-230 - I understand you had a structured process developing codes of the included documents but what type of interpretation took place in order to understand occurring challenges in the health care system - were documents compared? - and what sort of pre-understanding did you have of what defines a challenge in 'purchase' of health services in order to recognize one in the documents?

Results

Line 240-244 - what is the problem with this finding that insurance companies follow tradition supervision programs (and what does it mean to follow such programs?)?
Line 249 - what is the meaning of this website in the middle of the sentence? - and why do these not include villagers and nomads? - what is the problem that it's not mass purchased?

Line 252-254 - please specify what is scattered - and what does it means that there is a lack of concentration in supervision system? and who carries out their evaluation and control?

Table 2. Several of the findings in this table seem to be the exactly same ones as the challenges mentioned in the introduction - how can that be? (hence again - how did you carry out the analysis?)

Line 278 - you refer to the requirements of society - what are those?

Line 280 - what kind of ethical risks are you thinking of?

Line 280-282 - I don’t understand how reverse choice leads to favoring a few people - please rephrase?

Line 290-291 - what type of pressure by providers do you refer to - and why is that a problem?

Line 291-294 - why is it a problem that a great amount of the costs are used for medicine - and how is that related to the Oil Company and 'supplementary insurances'? (and what does supplementary insurances cover?)

Line 295-296 - what does 'lack of ranking of pharmaceutical supplies' stand for?

Discussion

I think the discussion is too long - rather than discussing practically every finding from the result section, I think the authors should select and prioritize the most important of these and then discuss them more in depth

Line 317-319 - If discussing purposefulness of subsidies then this result should also be described in the result section. How can subsidies bring about more appropriate preparation?

Line 341 - what is 'openness of demand section'?

Line 344-347 - what is the 'rural family physician proposal' - and what has that to do with the previously stated challenges?

Line 366-367 - what is 'reversed selection outbreak', and 'radar syndrome'?

Line 395 - what is meant by the 'drug service packages are superficial'?
Conclusions

Line 430-435 - introducing recent health policies in the conclusion I think it’s misplaced - please transfer to discussion

Line 442-446 - limits should be moved to the discussion section

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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