Reviewer’s report

Title: Strengthening referral systems in community health programs: a qualitative study in two rural districts of Maputo Province, Mozambique

Version: 0 Date: 01 Sep 2018

Reviewer: Dan Schwarz

Reviewer's report:

Dear authors,

Thank you for the privilege of reviewing this excellent work. I congratulate you all, along with the CHWs, health workers, and community members, who have contributed to the development of such important work to advance global public health. Thank you.

I strongly recommend this manuscript for publication. I list, below, several small suggestions, which I will defer to the authors to decide upon. My suggestions are not contingent upon publication, and regardless of what the authors choose, I believe this should be published.

Thank you for your work.

Warm regards,
Dan Schwarz

Suggestions:
1) REACHOUT intervention - While the qualitative research presented here in this manuscript is compelling and valuable, from a programmatic and policy perspective, the intervention itself is also of great value to the world. If it is feasible, I would suggest that the authors include a Supplemental Appendix (that could be made available online, even if not in print), of several pages of narrative text describing the intervention itself in a purely programmatic way (not "research"). Specifically, it would be helpful to better understand the details regarding the section entitled "REACHOUT/Intervention" and very specifically:

- More detail about the development of the referral slips, what information is included on each slip, how they are distributed, etc etc. Perhaps even including one of the referral slips as a Figure (in the manuscript or in a Supplemental Appendix, contingent upon the publication's space constraints) would be valuable to the readers. I personally would love to see what a slip looks like and think about how it could be modified for other similar LMIC settings globally.

- More detail about the CHW and CHW supervisor training in supportive supervision, and what that training included, etc. If there are training manuals available, I imagine many readers from other similar LMIC settings would appreciate having access to them as global public goods.
2) English language typographical / grammatical errors - While not prohibitive to reading the article, the manuscript would benefit from some English language editorial work. This is purely regarding grammar / syntax, not about content. The content is excellent, but there are some sections that are not quite perfect from an English-language perspective. For ex, the "REACHOUT/Intervention" section has multiple missing articles ("the" or "a") and a few singular / plural mis-alignments. Similarly, on line 26 of pg 26, there is a missing "it" (...system, IT is important to....). The authors might consider requesting some close editorial support prior to submitting their final version.

3) Separate manuscript suggestion - This is, of course, completely outside the scope of this manuscript under review, but I would humbly request the authors to consider an additional manuscript about the design and implementation experience with their referral slips. As the authors keenly note in their manuscript, there is a significant dearth of real-world implementation experience, much less high-quality research, about the *how* of attaining high-quality community and facility health linkages. Their experience with these referral slips, while clearly designed as an implementation project focused on real patient care (and not "research" in the purist form) would likely be beneficial to similar program implementers and policy makers globally. I would love to see a manuscript detailing the design, the implementation, and process metrics of the process. For ex, how many slips are distributed to patients, how many are received at the facilities, how many have their clinician comments filled out and returned to the CHWs, how many patients report that they had expedited treatment, etc etc. These are all common challenges faced globally, and as we all continue the journey towards UHC, the authors' experience should be valued by many others around the world.

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

Yes

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

Yes

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.
I am able to assess the statistics

**Quality of written English**
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Needs some language corrections before being published

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