Reviewer’s report

Title: New Insight into the Informal Patients’ Payments on the Evidence of Literature: A systematic Review Study

Version: 0 Date: 25 Jan 2019

Reviewer: Charles Normand

Reviewer's report:

This is a carefully conducted literature review with evidence that the authors are aware of good practice in assessing evidence. It is of a standard to be part of a PhD project to support additional work. The evidence reviewed is qualitative and should therefore focus on understanding how and why things happen. There is little evidence presented about the level, extent or scale of informal payments in different settings. I have two main concerns. First, the scope of the evidence presented is quite limited, and the discussion and conclusions should more fully reflect that this is the case. We are not given any good reason to assess the extent to which informal payments really are a problem, and there is no link between the qualitative evidence on how and why things are happening and the extent of the problems. Second, given the limitations in the available evidence it is really quite difficult to draw conclusions. Part of the difficulty is that there is really no way in which the review assesses the quality of the studies reviewed. In some senses this is always difficult in evidence reviews of qualitative evidence but beyond the (well described) process of inclusion of studies there is assessment of the quality of the studies included. I would expect some more formal way to make judgments about the design of studies and is appropriateness for the questions explored.

A small additional issue is the choice of language. While it is welcome to see literature in other languages being included, there is no focus in the paper on the effects of including literature in Persian and indeed if really anything additional is achieved. Given that this potentially distorts the picture by including one region but excluding non-English papers from all other regions this needs much clearer justification beyond the obvious point that the authors can do this. My inclination is to make the small point that the search aimed to include evidence in Persian but in fact this did not provide important additional evidence and the review covers English language papers.

One finding from this review is that the evidence around informal payments is thin, and that policy is based on very limited understanding of the scale of the problem, its causes and what interventions might be useful. I think the review could usefully bring out these features and challenges.
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?
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Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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No

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I am able to assess the statistics

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