Author's response to reviews

Title: Using pay for performance incentives (P4P) to improve management of suspected malaria fevers in rural Kenya; a cluster-randomized controlled trial

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Author's response to reviews:

August 12, 2015

To the Editor,

Thank you for your email. We have addressed your two additional queries below. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Wendy Prudhomme O'Meara, PhD
Associate Professor, Duke University
Visiting Lecturer, Moi University School of Public Health
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Eldoret, Kenya

From your email dated August 12, 2015:

Thanks very much for returning your revised manuscript. When assessing your revisions, it unfortunately seems one point for revisions has been missed, specifically our request to 'Additionally, please explain in your discussion how your study provides an advance over previously published work. Please note that future consideration in BMC Medicine will depend on your revisions' in our previous email. If you could please provide a response to this point, we would be most grateful.
I apologize for this omission. We have added to the discussion the following description of the novel and important contributions of this study:

“This work adds to the current literature in several important dimensions across multiple disciplines. First, it contributes new knowledge in the area of performance-based incentives, an area that has generated much interest but suffers from a lack of rigorous evidence in developing countries. It is the only study of which we are aware that has a truly experimental design for testing P4P incentives in sub-Saharan Africa. Our pay for performance program was also novel in two important respects; we focused on quality of care rather than volume of services and we used facility-directed rather than provider directed services. Second, ours is a completely new approach to tackling the problem of over-use of antimalarials and improving malaria case management. Other studies have tested training interventions, introduction of new diagnostic tools, and community education to improve adherence to the WHO policy of parasitological diagnosis before treatment but this is the first report of using incentives to improve adherence to the policy. Finally, the results can inform quality improvement and behavior change interventions in health care delivery more broadly.

This is the first experimental evidence of the impact of pay for performance incentives in sub-Saharan Africa. We demonstrate that facility-based incentives, rather than personal incentives paid to providers, were able to promote behavior change. This is particularly important in a resource-constrained system since a facility-based approach allows funds to be re-invested in health infrastructure and enhances the sustainability and benefit to the patients. We observed that intervention facilities invested in infrastructure that significantly improved or expanded the services they were able to provide. In addition, the monetary value of the incentives in our program was designed to be offset by the money saved through reduced wastage of expensive ACTs.”

The emphasis on quality, sustainability, and facility improvement are the most unique and important contributions of our program. That we were able to test our approach in a randomized experimental design makes this a significant contribution to the evidence-base for performance-based incentives.

In addition, we noticed that one sentence from reviewer 2's recommendation (http://www.biomedcentral.com/imedia/5314757101801245_comment.pdf) was changed from 'In short, this is a valuable study that merits publication in BMC Health Services with minor recommended revisions.' to 'In short, this is a valuable study that merits publication in BMC Medicine with minor recommended revisions.' in your cover letter (http://www.biomedcentral.com/imedia/1494444117183166_comment.pdf). Could you please clarify this?

Yes. Since we submitted our manuscript to BMC Medicine, I assumed that the mention of BMC Health Services was just a simple oversight on the part of the reviewer. I changed it for consistency, but have changed it back to the original and re-uploaded the document. I sincerely apologize if this assumption was incorrect. I did not intend to alter the reviewer’s meaning in any way.