Reviewer's report

Title: Non physician clinicians within a managed clinical network may be an effective way to improve child health in Malawi

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Reviewer: Mark V Pauly

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This is a brief article describing plans to expand access to pediatric care in rural Malawi through the greater use of trained Clinical Officers (CO's). It proposes the hypothesis that such a scheme will have the intended effect, and very briefly describes the plans to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

The shortage of pediatric physicians in Malawi is fundamentally due to small numbers of pediatricians, but is exacerbated by movement of physicians away from the government health system either to other countries or to some other kind of physician practice not in rural areas. Thus the need to expand access in a different way is well established in the article. The idea that a managed clinical network may help is plausible enough a priori, but is only supported by some general reference to a cancer network in the UK. It would seem that there should be more literature cited in support of this approach.

The other issue that should be discussed is the possible erosion from the ranks of trained Cos. Will they stay in this job—are they paid enough relative to the workload and relative to other opportunities for educated workers to retain them?

The other question I had was the timeline—how soon will there be enough data to evaluate this hypothesis?

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.