Reviewer's report

Title: A survey of pharmacists' perception of foundation level competencies in African countries

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Reviewer: Zubin Austin

Reviewer's report:

Congratulations to the authors for writing an interesting manuscript on a topic of significant importance to the pharmacy community. The topic and focus of this work is highly relevant to the continuing evolution of the pharmacy profession.

Overall, the manuscript demonstrated a high level of quality: a rigorous development and validation process was described and the application of the tool to the 4 countries described yielded important findings. The manuscript itself was well written and easy to read.

Some thoughts for the authors to consider to enhance the quality of the work:

a) While Africa was the context for the analysis, the four countries described may or may not have important cultural and practice related differences that could affect the applicability of a continent wide tool. For naive readers such as myself, some additional detail regarding the practice contexts of these different countries would be useful.

b) The finding related to lack of "interest" in reporting of medication incidents and near misses is very important to quality use of medicines. The authors provide a cursory discussion of this point, but further elaboration would be helpful. In particular, local cultural practices around the roles of health professionals and the meaning of "error" would likely be important to explaining this finding. I don't feel the authors have spent enough time on this important point; further examination in the literature of error management practices among African health care providers might help to explain/align these findings for the reader.

c) It may be helpful to provide further explanation regarding the importance and potential impact of this work, in particular the next steps that work such as this could produce. This is briefly mentioned, but in such scant detail that it is easy to miss.

d) A more thoughtful discussion of methodological limitations of this work would be helpful; the highly quantitative approach the authors have taken is certainly useful, but
does not necessarily provide the insight necessary to support the conclusions related to emerging standardized competencies that have been made. The authors do note that selection bias and sample size issues limit broader applicability of their work, but without additional qualitative follow-up work I believe it will be challenging to make the case that this emerging consensus is actually real, and not simply a statistical artifact. I believe this study is well constructed and thoughtfully described, and while necessary, it is insufficient to support the conclusions that have been made, without clearer signposting of limitations and next steps.

e) The work is localized within the pharmacy community, but it would be helpful to include reference to similar work that may have been undertaken in other health professions, to provide readers with a comparative context. The thorny issue of self-selection bias is of course important in any study of this sort, but particularly within this African context may require further elaboration.

I hope these comments are helpful; overall, the authors have provided important insights into an issue of relevance and importance, and I recommend this manuscript be moved ahead for publication, if the authors are able to address the concerns addressed above. Thank you.

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

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