Reviewer's report

Title: Print media coverage of primary health care and related research evidence in South Africa

Version: 2 Date: 27 April 2015

Reviewer: Charlotte Hanlon

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Print media coverage of primary health care and related research evidence in South Africa

This is a well-written paper where the authors take an innovative approach to considering one of the interfaces between the public and policy-makers: a content analysis of print media. Strengths of the paper include the clear and detailed description of methodology, the number of newspapers analysed and the time period considered, as well as the analysis in relation to important policy developments in primary health care in South Africa. The findings are thought-provoking, particularly in relation to the lack of reporting of high-quality research studies on primary healthcare issues. The main limitation (acknowledged by the authors) is that other forms of media and non-English print media may more be more influential on both the public and policy-makers.

I only have minor comments and suggestions for the authors.

Minor discretionary revisions

Abstract:

1. Findings (line 3): ‘related to clinics’ is a little unclear. Would PHC facilities be clearer for a wider audience? Also, related to the service, organisation or what?
2. (line 8) instead of referring to organisation of care you could speak of health system level.
3. Conclusions: this seemed a little weak. The focus is more on the use of this methodology rather than the findings. Also lengthy.

Introduction:

4. This is lengthy but mostly justified because of the need to explain about the approach.

Methods:

5. Do we have any idea of the general population coverage of the newspapers from SA that are included in LexisNexis?

6. Did the absolute number of articles from the newspapers remain stable over time? This is important for understanding the pattern of PHC articles over time.
7. How was the decision made about whether the article was primarily focused on PHC vs. a secondary interest or brief mention? Even if PHC is mentioned briefly it may still be carrying a powerful message about PHC.

8. Can you clarify about the inter-rater reliability measurements? How many people, assessing how many articles?

9. Discussion is a bit repetitive. Try to cut back words and reduce the overlap between sections.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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.