Author’s response to reviews

Title: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF GUIDELINES USED FOR MANAGEMENT OF SEVERE ACUTE MALNUTRITION IN SOUTH AFRICA’S REFERRAL SYSTEM

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Author’s response to reviews:

Thank you very much for revising our paper, Please find the revisions (in track changes) in the main manuscript.

Reviewer #1:

1. Page 4 - In the literature review the definition of SAM according to the WHO is 115mm not 110. If 110 mm cut off is used we would underdiagnose patients. Please verify with WHO SAM guidelines or mention alternatives in literature review

   Thank you very much for your useful observation, we have replaced the 110mm with 115mm measure stipulated in the WHO (2013) update on management of SAM. Additionally we have made reference to the WHO book which has now become reference number 6. (see page 4 and reference number 6)

2. Although the process seems to be unbiased, clearly mixed methods of research was used. It is not clearly stated that the same interviewees were used for all the guidelines. For the EDL there was clearly a wide selected interviewees. Please declare bias in methods regarding interviewees.

   We appreciate this observation thus we have added a sentence that is clarifying on which interviewees commented on what guideline on page 9: “one government official, one academic and one frontline health worker commented on the EDL, the other health worker
commented on the IMCI while the other academic mainly commented on the IMC-SAM and added comments to other guidelines”.

- Additionally we have highlighted the bias toward guidelines WHO-Steps and IMCI which lack comments from part of the developing teams on page 21: “However, we acknowledge a bias towards IMCI and WHO-Steps since there were no views from the developing teams thus our critiques based on outsiders views”.

3. Conclusions seem reasonable, rigor of examination of the protocols seems transparent and clear except for the qualitative part of the review.

- Thank you for this observation, we feel the acknowledgement of bias added on page 21 addresses this concern as well.

Reviewer #2: Withdrew review due to emergency travel.

Reviewer #3:

I recommend that this paper be accepted for publication. The topic is of great importance regarding the care of children with severe acute malnutrition.

I have a few minor edits which may increase the readability of the paper:

1. Page 4 - please reconsider re-wording the sentence, "Waterlow associated detailed and minimal errors in malnutrition treatment to the use of standardized protocols or guidelines". I found this sentence difficult to understand.

- Thank you for this observation, we have reworded the sentence as follows “Waterlow (1999) found that detailed and minimal errors in malnutrition treatment were associated with the use of standardized protocols or guidelines”.

2. Page 5 - please consider inserting the following, "SA-based studies that *have previously* explored SAM treatment...".

- We appreciate your contribution; we have added the phrase to the sentence. It now reads as follows: “SA-based studies that have previously explored SAM treatment guidelines have
only focused on adaptation of WHO 10 steps for in-patient care of children with SAM to rural hospitals”.

3. Please ensure that you spell dietitian correctly throughout, ie dietitian not dietician.

- We appreciate your observation, we have replaced dietician with dietitian on pages 8, 9, 17, 19 and 20.

4. Page 12 - Should "paediatrics" in the sentence, "Singled out were various paediatrics.." be paediatricians?

- Thank you for noticing, we have replaced paediatrics with paediatricians.