Reviewer’s report

Title: Impact of rural family physician program on child mortality rates in Iran: a time-series study

Version: 1 Date: 28 Jan 2017

Reviewer: Nancy Fullman

Reviewer’s report:

Many thanks for the authors' thorough responses and revisions - this is a substantially improved manuscript. I have three remaining comments, though one should be considered in light of my limited knowledge of the appropriateness of a segmented regression model for this type of study over others. If the journal can find someone to confirm this statistical approach as the preferred method for this study, I am happy to recommend for acceptance.

My three comments are as follows:

(1) While I fully appreciate the authors' responses, I still do not understand why missing values were not imputed or otherwise modeled to allow for a full time series analysis. Given the otherwise complete nature of the data (and the acknowledgment that mortality and Behvarz density measures should not fluctuate substantially between years), it seems like a reasonable step. Fully omitting 2007, a year during which the program was being implemented, seems problematic.

(2) I strongly believe there is an important distinction between using child mortality measures as a signal of overall health system performance or a country's health status (as the health-related SDG index suggests), and using child mortality measures to reflect the impact of implementing a specific program - the rural physician and insurance program - that aims to address health needs beyond child survival (eg, ensuring access to routine care, averting catastrophic health expenditures for families). I would like to see a sentence in the limitations section which acknowledges that other indicators (eg, changes in care-seeking behaviors, effective coverage of interventions, reductions in out-of-pocket health expenditures) may be more immediately sensitive to the effects of the rural physician and insurance program implementation, but such data were not available across provinces and over time.

(3) Consider adding one more sentence to the end of the abstract's Conclusions section to summarize what are the implications of your results.

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Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English
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