Author’s response to reviews

Title: Assessing the Integrated Community-Based Health Systems Strengthening Initiative in Northern Togo: A Pragmatic Effectiveness-Implementation Study Protocol

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Version: 1 Date: 21 Jun 2019

Author’s response to reviews:

June 21, 2019

Dear Editors of Implementation Science,

Thank you for your thoughtful commentary and suggestions. We hope the attached revision of manuscript IMPS-D-19-00275, "Assessing the Integrated Community-Based Health Systems Strengthening Initiative in Northern Togo: A Pragmatic Effectiveness-Implementation Study Protocol" and revised Table 4 address all of the concerns raised. We sincerely appreciate this opportunity to resubmit the manuscript and have made recommended changes as detailed below.

Reviewer Response 1: At Implementation Science, our focus is on the publication of protocols evaluating clearly defined implementation strategies. We are less interested in those that focus on how a complex intervention was implemented. Although described as a Hybrid Type II hybrid study we note that the trial outcomes measures are clinical and that you are using RE-AIM to gather information on implementation processes (not effectiveness). This is more indicative of a Hybrid Type I design which falls outside of our journal scope. Can you clarify please.
We revised the manuscript to address design concerns so that it more clearly explains how this study is a Hybrid Type II design. Specifically, we included additional language regarding how the study’s aims focus on evaluating both effectiveness and implementation strategies in the abstract (page 2, line 14-15, 23-26) and methods/design section (page 9, line 246-258; page 10, line 272, 286; page 11 line 305-306, 311). We additionally added language throughout to clarify measurement of implementation strategies vs effectiveness (page 7, line 174-176,184, 188-189; page 8, line 199-204, 206-207, 209-213; page 9, line 240; page 16 line 486; page 17 line 498, 500-501).

To address concerns about RE-AIM measures we clarified how the framework organizes data on clinical effectiveness (primary aim 1) under the effectiveness domain and implementation strategies (primary aim 2) under reach, adoption, implementation, and maintenance domains within the study rationale section (page 7 line 184, 188-189; page 8 line 199-213) and the data collection and analysis sections (page 13 line 370, 374-377; page 14 line 378-397; page 15 line 411, 420, 426).

Furthermore, we revised Table 4 to include a new column with specific study aim for each RE-AIM domain. We hope that these revisions more clearly reflect measurement of effectiveness and implementation strategies within this evaluation framework.

We revised language about ICBHSS as a complex intervention as the goal of this manuscript is to describe the methods utilized to evaluate an implementation strategy for healthcare service delivery and to inform Togolese national community health strategies and policy. While the ICBHSS model includes evidence-based interventions, the model as described in Table 1, encompasses key additional implementation characteristics that are unique to implementation strategies including key actors, actions, target population, temporality, supporting evidence with adaptations for local setting. As such we think it is best described as an implementation strategy.

Reviewers Response 2: Please also revisit the likely contribution to the literature and take time to consider what the likely methodological, theoretical and or empirical contribution to implementation science (and not complex interventions generally) may be.

Thank you for this comment and agree with your suggestion. We revised the likely contribution to literature section to describe the protocol’s contributions. Specifically, we revised this section with 3 clearer descriptions (page 4, lines 68-79). We summarized how this protocol evaluates an implementation strategy that can help improve healthcare delivery, foster embedded implementation research, and inform community health policy in low-income settings. We think that the revised version better aligns and furthers the discussion regarding the importance of implementation research in all settings, but especially in low-income communities.

Sincerely,

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