

Reviewer's report

Title: Assessing Health Systems for Insulin-Requiring Diabetes in sub-Saharan Africa: Developing a 'Rapid Assessment Protocol for Insulin Access'

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Reviewer: Ellen E. Nolte

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript describes the development and application of a rapid assessment tool for the evaluation of insulin-access in low resource settings using a whole systems approach. This is an important paper that contributes to the advancement of approaches to health system performance assessment and is therefore recommended for publication. There are, however, some aspects of the manuscript in its current format that the authors are encouraged to revisit so as to develop its quality further.

1. Background (1): Given that this paper aims to describe an analytical tool to evaluate insulin-access this section could be restructured to focus more specifically on framing the question on why it is important to develop this instrument. It appears thus less important to describe the condition as such (1st paragraph) than to highlight the importance of taking a systems approach to understand 'failures' of a given health system of providing sufficient access to insulin and related supplies as well as access to appropriate care. As noted later in the manuscript, the instrument is designed to trace the pathway of insulin in low income countries from the point of its arrival in the country until it reaches (or not) the patient and to understand the constraints along this pathway. This should be made clear in the introduction.
2. Background (2): Will it be possible to give some estimate of the burden of type I diabetes in SSA?
3. Design / The RAPIA protocol / Implementation of the RAPIA: These sections aim to describe the development of the instrument. However, the way these sections are structured in the present manuscript tends to lack a red thread that guides the reader systematically through how the instrument was developed (e.g. instead of listing the key words of the literature search [p. 2, 3rd para – or else provide in the appendix] the authors are encouraged to provide a succinct overview of its findings and how they fed into the development of the protocol), as well as detail as to the actual nature of the instrument. As a consequence, these sections tend to be a bit repetitive (e.g. there are 3 sections outlining the aims of the RAPIA [p. 2, second last para; p.3, first para; p. 3. second last para] which could usefully be streamlined into one section so as to guide the reader better). As regards the nature of the instrument it is unclear as to how the stakeholders were identified; the target number of interviews at each level so as to enable assessment of the various items; the exact nature of data to be obtained (only mentioned in the latter part of the paper [p. 5, second last para] – this should form part of the description of the instrument; also, how did you estimate prevalence/life expectancy?); what is meant by 'proper diabetes care' [p. 4, 3rd para]; how and why were the countries chosen; etc. Also: what is meant by 'informal meetings' – did these involve the questionnaire, how did they contribute to the analysis, how were they analysed?
4. The RAPIA process:
 - The process as described on p. 4 [last three paras] is outlined in figure 1 already and does therefore not require detailed description in the text.
 - Country examples/findings: it may be useful to present these in form of a table so as to provide an

instant overview. This will also allow to provide more detailed information on the process [e.g. Mozambique: how were the 76 interviews and 30 informal meetings distributed over the various levels, e.g. how many patients were interviewed?]

5. Discussion: Reference 17 [p. 6, second para] does not seem an appropriate here [as it does not refer to diabetes]; a more appropriate one might be Hopkinson et al. (2004) *Int J Health Plann Manage.* 19:43-61.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.