

Review of: "Assessing the financial impact of physician self-referral on patients and how they cope with payment in Southeast Nigeria"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This study explores how the dual practice of medical doctors effect patients' healthcare expenditures for Southeast Nigeria according to a survey data collected by the authors.

It is an important reach question and indeed the authors gather a valuable data set.

However, there are some key issues that should be either clarified or improved. Actually, the authors should be aware of "selection bias" risk and took necessary precautions.

First of all they pick an representative sample of 407 that is composed patients either referred to private hospitals from the public ones or not referred. Authors first find out that 34 patients referred and presents these patients costs in Table 2, there after compare these cost with respect to information provided in Table 3. I tried to understand how they gather the information on Table 3, it was not explained on the text. Table 3 was titled as "Estimated mean cost of treatment in public hospitals for the same health conditions for which patients were referred to the private sector (n=34)". Whether the authors pick up a sample of 34 among their non-referred patients of 373 and then compare these two populations; or they just calculate by their self what if these 34 referred patient would be treated at the public hospitals? Actually I would advise them applying "propensity score matching " methods in order to pick up a reliable comparison group from their sample. This is my main critic to their findings.

Second of all, I would advise authors to calculate the catastrophe level of these out of pockect healthcare expenditures that would be a valuable information. Finally, main indicators of Nigeria like per capita income, general health statistics would be informative and indeed necessary from the international readers point of view.