

Quality of basic maternal care functions in low-income countries

Margaret Kruk and colleagues (November, 2016)¹ report on the quality of basic maternal care and the association with the volume of deliveries and surgical capacity in five sub-Saharan African countries. They conclude that, in low-income countries, facilities with caesarean section capacity and with birth volumes greater than 500 per year had higher scores for maternal care quality.

We would like to invite Kruk and colleagues to provide any information they may have about whether the women attending the primary or secondary health facilities to give birth were at low risk or high risk of complications during delivery. It could be that women who would be considered to be at high risk gave birth in primary instead of secondary health facilities because of geographical restrictions, therefore skewing the score results of the process-of-care indicators the researchers used in their 12-item summative index of care quality. Likewise, women at low risk delivering at secondary health facilities would make the process-of-care indicators look better because of the occurrence of fewer complications, even after acknowledging the fact that 30% of women considered to be at low risk might develop an unexpected complication during or after delivery.²

In England, and in accordance with NICE guidance,³ women are offered continuous risk assessment throughout pregnancy, and if classified to be at low risk of complications at delivery they are advised that they can deliver safely at home or in freestanding midwifery-led settings. However, if a woman is considered to be at high risk then the planned place of birth is advised to be within the obstetric unit to ensure a safer perinatal outcome.

We declare no competing interests.

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- 1 Kruk ME, Leslie HH, Verguet S, Mbaruku G, Adanu RMK, Langer A. Quality of basic maternal care functions in health facilities of five African countries: an analysis of national health system surveys. *Lancet Glob Health* 2016; **11**: e845–55.
- 2 Danilack VA, Nunes AP, Phipps MG. Unexpected complications of low-risk pregnancies in the United States. *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 2015; **212**: 809 e1–6.
- 3 NICE Guideline (cg190). Intrapartum care for healthy women and babies. London: National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2014.

