Reviewer's report

Title: Missed Opportunities for tobacco use screening and brief cessation advice in South African primary care: A cross sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 23 June 2010

Reviewer: Michael C Fiore

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Overall Comments and Substantive Concerns-Major Compulsory Revisions:

This is helpful addition to the literature, providing rarely collected data from a developing country – South Africa – on the rates of clinical interventions among tobacco users visiting healthcare facilities. Data from such setting is extremely helpful and important, particularly as both developed and developing countries move to implement the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control to reduce rates of tobacco use. The paper has some challenges that should be addressed. Some of these relate to language issues and I have made a number of specific line edit suggestions below may make the paper easier to read.

Among the more substantive concerns are:

1. Describe the sample in more detail - specifically in terms of representativeness and other selection bias issues. You report in the first paragraph of the methods (page 4) that the clinic “…serves a target population of approximately 75,000 and manages about 5500 adult patients per month.” In the next paragraph you go on to say that you “…recruited 500 participants…” What is unclear is the denominator. How many patients or clinic visits did you have to recruit/follow to reach your enrollment of 500? Did you collect denominator data on all clinic attendees – not just those who agreed to participate - in terms of their demographics? If so, did the 500 who agreed to participate differ from those who didn’t participate? In essence, you need to describe your total sample in more detail so that the reader can understand better whether your sample of 500 is reflective of clinic patients in general and did not represented a biased sample on the basis of selection. It may be that those was a “convenience sample” of 500 (in essence, the first 500 who agreed to participate) and that you don’t have demographic and other information on those who chose not to enroll. If that is the case, you need to acknowledge that your population of 500 was a convenience sample and then list the potential of selection bias among the limitations of the study in the discussion section.

2. Related to this, in the methods section, it would be helpful if you indicated the number and type of clinicians in the clinic where the screening took place.

3. Clarify your use of the terms, “recent and/or past consultations”. I found the manuscript confusing on this point. If I understand it correctly, in your exit-interview questionnaire, you asked about being screened for and advised
about tobacco use at the current (screening) clinic visit and at a prior clinic visit within the last year. If I have it correct, you use the term “recent” for the “current, screening clinic visit.” From my perspective, the term “current (screening) clinic visit” is more clear. If that is the case, this needs to be clarified throughout the manuscript – in the abstract, methods, results, discussion, and tables. Clearer descriptors for the current (screening) clinic visit and prior clinic visits (within the last year) are necessary. For example, this was particularly confusing to me in the abstract. You state in the results section of the abstract, “Only 12.9% of participants were screened for tobacco use at their recent consultation.” I assume you mean there at the current clinic visit when the exit survey was administered. A few lines later, you state, “While 11.9% of tobacco users reporting being advised at the recent consultation, 35.1% reported having ever been advised to quit within the past year, aside the recent consultation.” This was confusing to me. It would be clearer to me if you stated something like, “Among the 500 survey participants, only 12.9% were screened for tobacco use at the current (screening) clinic visit.” And the second sentence might be rewritten to say, “Among the 134 current tobacco users, 11.9% reported being advised at the current (screening) clinic visit) and 35.1% at any visit within the last year.”

4. In the methods section under “recruitment of participants’ and consent, you refer to two separate ways you recruited participants for the exit interview. The first was for “Participants attended by doctors were approached at the pharmacy waiting room…” Did all patients who saw doctors go to the pharmacy? What about visits that didn’t result in a prescription for medication? Where patients who didn’t fill a prescription ineligible for inclusion if they say a physician? Might this introduce an additional selection bias? This needs to be clarified.

5. In the discussion on page 9 (third para) you describe limitations of your study. In that section, you need to address point #1 above.

Specific Line Edit Suggestions-Minor Revisions:
Abstract, page 2, line 23: add to the end of the sentence the words: and subsequent cessation.
Background, page 3, paragraph 2, line 6: delete the semicolon after the word “form,” and replace with a comma.
Background, page 4, paragraph 2, line 2: add the word “PHC” after the word “on-going” and before “screening.”
Discussion, page 7, paragraph 1, line 2: add the word “a,” as follows: “…cessation activities in a PHC setting…”
Discussion, page 7, paragraph 1, line 6: delete the word “intervene” and replace with the word “addressed”
Discussion, page 7, paragraph 1, line 8: delete the words “what obtains in” and replace with the word “other”
Discussion, page 7, paragraph 1, line 12: delete the words “promoting a further reduction in” and replace with “reducing”
Discussion, page 7, paragraph 2, line 14: delete the word “clients” and replace with the word “patients”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 1, line 2: delete the words “to quit” and replace with “quitting”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 1, line 3: delete the word “regular” and replace with “past year”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 1, line 4: after “p=0.09” add the words “for current and past year” before “respectively”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 1, line 6: remove the words “start contemplating” and replace with “contemplate”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 2, line 1: remove the words “who reported” and “to be”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 2, line 2: after the comma, remove the word “indicating” and insert the words “and they indicated”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 2, line 3: Insert a period after the word “interventions.” Remove the word “and” and insert and capitalize the word “This”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 3, line 1: You state, “The majority of participants (81.5%) – is it the majority of participants or the majority of tobacco users?

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 3, line 2: delete the word “reckoned” and replace with the word “reported”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 4, line 1: delete the word “worrying” and replace with the word “concerning”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 4, line 2: delete the second use of the word “and” and replace with “or”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 4, line 15: at the end of the sentence, add the words “and intervention”

Discussion, page 8, paragraph 5, line 3: Delete the word “However” and capitalize the word “Despite,” then add the words “the fact that” after the word “Despite”

Discussion, page 9, paragraph 0 (end of paragraph 5 from page 8), line 1: delete the word “consulting” and add the words “consulted their clinician”

Discussion, page 9, paragraph 0, line 4: delete the word “health” and replace with the word “disease,” delete the words “on-going”

Discussion, page 9, paragraph 0, line 10: after “intensifying” add the words “the delivery of”

Discussion, page 9, paragraph 1 (first full paragraph on this page), line 5: delete the words “on which” and replace with “for”

Discussion, page 9, paragraph 2, line 4: remove the word “awareness” and replace with the word “recognition”

Discussion, page 9, paragraph 2, line 5: after the word “comprehensive” add the
word “clinician”

Discussion, page 9, paragraph 3, line 1: after the word “limitations” add a comma, and delete the word “however” and the comma following it

Discussion, page 9, paragraph 3, line 3: delete the words “based on which” and replace with the words “to develop” and delete the words “further in-depth studies” and replace with “to study further”

Discussion, page 9, paragraph 2, line 4: delete the word “use” and delete the words “can be planned” and replace with “in South Africa”

Conclusion, page 10, paragraph 1, line 4: delete the word “found” and replace with the word “documented”

Conclusion, page 10, paragraph 2, line 5: after the word “screening” add the words “and intervention”

Conclusion, page 10, paragraph 3, line 2: delete the words “plan to” and delete the word “an”

Conclusion, page 10, paragraph 3, line 3: delete the word “program” and replace with the word “programs”

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.