Reviewer’s report

Title: New challenges in treating problematic crystal methamphetamine use and associated depression in gay and HIV positive men: in-depth interviews with general practitioners

Version: 2 Date: 2 May 2008

Reviewer: Leana Uys

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Review:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

Not really. There is some confusion about whether the authors set out to describe the impact on GPs or the impact on the gay population. Both of these objectives are mentioned on p 4, and in the last sentence of the first paragraph under “Discussion” they talk about impact without clarifying the target of this impact. This needs to be clarified. I would suggest that they talk about describing the current experiences of GPs in relation to this particular population, rather than talking about impact, which is a term that creates a lot of expectations. Referring to the experiences of GPs will also fit better with the methodology.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The methods were appropriate, but not particularly well described. For instance:

- Were the interviews specific to the gay and HIV positive clients of the GPs? This is not clear from the paragraph describing the interviews, and leaves one wondering whether all the GPs remarks are specific to this population or whether they are talking about their clients in general.

- Which themes emerged and now did the “themes” described in this article fit with the rest of the themes? I find this important in order to understand the context in which the GPs descriptions were given.

- Reliability: What exactly did the research team do to establish reliability? This needs some more description.

3. Are the data sound?

Yes, the qualitative data clearly illustrates the “themes” identified. However, I believe there is a difference between “health service” and “health care”. Some of the issues identified under “health service” are care issues, such as patients becoming “nasty” or wrong diagnoses being made because of drug use or GPs not knowing how to manage.

The health service issues include the increased workload because patients experience breakdowns when they use drugs.
The authors indicate that they took into consideration “how” things were said. There is no evidence of such analysis in the report, and it may be best to leave such a claim out.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   Yes.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   The problem of exactly what was investigated again becomes apparent. Are we discussing a problem of men who are both gay and HIV positive, or not? The first sentence of the first paragraph on page 11 talks about meth use in “a wide range of male patients”. Four issues are on the table in the article: being gay, being HIV positive, being depressed and using meths. But throughout it is difficult to follow whether they first two conditions are always present when the GPs discuss the last two conditions.

There is no discussion about the implications for ARV use in this population. Was this not touched on? Then this should be dealt with in the discussion as a limitation or as an implication which needs further investigation.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   State the limited sample as a limitation, but this is not really a problem. The depth of the interviews might have been a problem if there was limited probing, for instance about the issue of ARV use.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   Yes.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   Yes.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
   Yes.

Major compulsory revisions:
1. Describe the methodology in more detail.
2. Clarify the objectives of the study.
3. Clarify the relationship between the four major concepts, but especially being gay and being HIV positive with regard to the responses of the respondents.

Discretionary revisions:
Address the issue of ARV use.
Clarify health service and health care problems.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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.