Reviewer’s report

Title: Delays in starting antiretroviral therapy in patients with HIV-associated tuberculosis accessing non-integrated clinical services in a South African township

Version: 1 Date: 16 July 2011

Reviewer: Douglas Wilson

Reviewer’s report:

This very well written paper convincingly demonstrates that tuberculosis (TB) patients diagnosed at a TB clinic started antiretroviral (ARV) therapy significantly later than those diagnosed with TB at an ARV-initiation site in Cape Town. This important finding that should prompt policy-makers to focus on minimizing barriers to prompt HIV testing, CD4 measurement, and ARV initiation in TB clinics to better integrate TB and HIV care. I understand that the # and # symbols in Figure 1 refer to a time period, but for convenience I have used these symbols to refer to the study participants in care during these times.

Major Revisions:

The paper opens by discussing mortality in co-infected patients but the mortality data in the #2 and # groups are not shown. Are these data going to be published separately?

Presumably all the patients diagnosed with TB at the ARV site (# group) were already known to be HIV seropositive. This would tend to shorten the delay to ARV initiation in this group as one logistic barrier had already been removed. If this assumption is correct it may need to be detailed in the methods section, and the bias mentioned in the discussion.

Presumably the TB diagnoses in the # group are due to passive case finding, and those in the # group are due to active case finding. This could reflect different healthcare seeking behaviour in the two group, and could also be a source of bias (e.g. those in the # group may be less willing to accept early HIV testing). The similarity in TB presentation in the # and # groups is striking though and may merit a sentence in the discussion.

Is the CD4 turn-around time in the two groups (#1 and #) known and were they similar? Or was the CD4 count already known prior to ART screening in the # group?

Minor Revisions:

The percentages in columns 2 to 4 in Table 2 are slightly confusing – they seem to be cumulative in the rows up to week 12, and thereafter a summary statistic beyond week 12. A note below the Table may make this clearer.

Discretionary Revisions
Could the main findings from Ref. 15 be summarized in the discussion?

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

**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.