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: 17 July 2011

Reviewer: Dermot Maher

Reviewer's report:

General comments:

1. This important paper clearly highlights the adverse consequences in terms of delays in starting ART and increased risk of death among HIV-positive TB patients associated with inadequate service integration. Publication of this paper is important to draw attention to the urgent need to improve the delivery of services and avoid unnecessary deaths. The situation in the township in Cape Town is typical of service provision throughout the sub-Saharan African region, so the study has very wide implications.

2. The study rationale, objectives, methodology, results and discussion are all clearly presented. The authors may like to take into consideration some comments which may help to provide insights into the context for the study and to point towards the policy implications of its results.

Discretionary revisions

1. A brief comment would be helpful on the availability of different service providers in the township, including private providers.

2. A brief explanation would be useful of how people with HIV infection are referred to the ART clinic (other than referral of TB patients) – presumably the ART clinic is often, or usually, not the first port of call for people with HIV infection who need ART.

3. Since the separate delivery of TB and HIV services has such strikingly awful consequences for HIV-positive TB patients, a brief explanation would be useful of how this state of affairs developed, which would then help to understand how service provision can be improved.

4. Although the authors have fulfilled their main responsibility to undertake and report objective research findings, their experience is very useful in informing plans to improve service delivery, so a brief account would be useful of how the authors think services can be reorganised to minimise the delays they have described and avoid unnecessary deaths among HIV-positive TB patients.

5. Mass campaigns for HIV testing in the general population are now taking off in
southern Africa, complementing the drive to increase HIV detection in patients presenting to health services through provider-initiated HIV testing. A brief comment would be useful on what may be the impact of a greater proportion of people with HIV infection knowing their HIV status before presenting with HIV-related illnesses (including TB) and being referred to the ART clinic.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.