Reviewer's report

Title: The impact of home-based HIV counseling and testing on care-seeking and incidence of common infectious disease syndromes in rural western Kenya

Version: 1 Date: 3 March 2014

Reviewer: Reshma Naik

Reviewer's report:

Overall, the authors have done a good job of revising this manuscript, addressing the reviewers’ comments, and illustrating the primary purpose of this study. However, there are still a few areas which could use some further clarification.

Major compulsory revisions:

1) Abstract. Conclusion. Your conclusion should more clearly match your hypothesis and methods. There’s too much of a jump here as it is not the HBCT that necessarily led to decreased incidence of infectious diseases. It is the high uptake of HBCT which led to raised awareness of status, plus the critical act of seeking care, and receiving appropriate care. The HBCT is just a platform for getting people to know their status, but is not the causal factor in and of itself. I would suggest rephrasing so that you are not going too broad with this conclusion.

2) Introduction. Second paragraph. It seems there is too much description about HBCT here, considering that the HBCT aspect shouldn’t really be your main focus. You can mention it as your platform for testing and raising awareness but don’t need to use this section to make the case for HBCT per se.

I would suggest that you rather use the space here to make the case for why linkage to care is so important (as it relates to your main infectious disease outcomes) so that you set the stage for why you are measuring this and why your results matter. For example, how prevalent are these infectious diseases in this community? And in other communities in sub-Saharan Africa? Among HIV-infected clients? What are their impacts on morbidity and mortality? What is the impact of early versus late treatment? I’m sure these issues are obvious to you, but you need to remind the reader why your study is so important.

3) Generally, there is a need to be more consistent about the way you state your conclusions throughout the paper. In some places, you mention “a likely causal sequence” whereas in other places you imply a more direct link to your outcomes.

Minor essential revisions:

4) Introduction. You mention HIV testing rates from 2007. Is this the most recent data available? It may be, but just a note to double check and update if possible.
5) Results. Can you make it more clear what the differences were in rates of all of the infectious diseases of interest at baseline between all of the comparison groups? If this is what you show in Table 2, reference the table and add some description in the text.

6) It seems that your time frame of measurement is one month after testing, and you also mention that this is a limitation, which is fine. But then in the results you also report enrollment in care at 3 months, 1 year, and 24 months. So this seems inconsistent and makes it a bit confusing. How is it that you have this data but weren’t able to use it for the analysis? Please clarify.

Discretionary revisions:

7) Page 3. Abstract. Consider rephrasing this sentence in the background: However, there is little data on whether knowing one’s HIV-positive status through HBCT will lead to a substantial increase in the number of HIV-infected persons in HIV care, resulting in a reduction in the morbidity of common infectious disease syndromes.

To make your point more clear, consider rephrasing to something along these lines: However, there is little data on whether knowing one’s HIV-positive status necessarily leads to uptake of HIV care, which could in turn, lead to a reduction in the prevalence of common infectious disease syndromes.

8) Page 9. Add a comma to this sentence: We calculated the incidence of four syndromes, (comma added here) namely acute respiratory illness (ARI)……

9) In the discussion section, it doesn’t seem necessary to have so much explanation about why so many people went to Lwak hospital rather than other facilities. You could potentially include the important reasons briefly in the methods section instead.

10) Page 14. This sentence in the second paragraph: The Lwak area is a malaria holoendemic area, where even adults suffer from several clinical malaria episodes per year.

Consider rephrasing to something like: The Lwak area is a malaria holoendemic area, where both children and adults suffer from several clinical malaria episodes every year.

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

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

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.