Reviewer's report

Title: Predictors of mortality in HIV-infected patients starting antiretroviral therapy in a rural hospital in Tanzania

Version: 3 Date: 18 February 2008

Reviewer: Stephen Lawn

Reviewer's report:

The revised version of this paper is improved.

A few minor revisions to make:

1. The abstract methods section should make it clear that CD4 cell counts were not available. It will then be clear to the readers that the associations with mortality in the results section are derived from analyses that did not include this as a variable.

2. Methods section, page 6. Since CD4 cell count data are not presented, the methods for CD4 cell count measurement are redundant.

3. The absence of an association of mortality with Stage 4 disease is at odds with the vast majority of studies. Possible additional reasons for this should be included in the discussion:

   i) The accuracy of clinical staging in clinical practice is quite variable... (this is not a criticism, it is simply a fact). This actually supports the development of more objective prognostic measures as has been done in this study (BMI and haemoglobin measurement).

   ii) Although the comparison group for stage 4 disease was Stahes 1-3, in reality the comparison group was almost entirely composed on stage 3 patients (only 12 had stages 1 and 2). This would weaken any observed association with stage 4.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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'