Reviewer’s report

Title: Immune control of HIV-1 infection after therapy interruption: immediate versus deferred antiretroviral therapy

Version: 3 Date: 23 July 2009

Reviewer: Radjin Steingrover

Reviewer’s report:

in reply to the revisions:

regarding question 6, major
From the response of the authors it’s clear that there’s a contrast between observations in primary HIV infection (PHI) so far and the results from the model. The authors resolve this by defining different phases of PHI and classifying studies with different results as observations in a different phase of PHI. Therefore, staging PHI now becomes important to this paper. Even though staging PHI is difficult, the authors will need to discuss these cohort and phases along a more accepted staging system like Fiebig stadia (Fiebig/Busch, AIDS) and present some data on which the staging is based. The time from diagnosis as is presented in the table is insufficient for this goal although it adds relevant information.

regarding question 7, major
The authors conclude that early treatment regardless of the phase of infection is unwarranted even though they state that they have only compared (their own) phase 2 and 3. The authors may still need to limit the scope of their conclusion. Conclusions regarding the efficacy of HAART during PHI can only be drawn from trials like SPARTAC and Primo-SHM. This model currently lacks the external validation required to make a claim like that. The reply that more discussion follows in a forthcoming paper is insufficient.

All other questions have been dealt with sufficiently.

The paper can/should be published in my opinion if the scope of the conclusion is limited but not as it is now. To think that this study affects or should affect clinical practice as is concluded is incorrect. And a strong conclusion as is drawn here is not needed to make this paper interesting in its own right.

I still click: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions.

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