Reviewer’s report

Title: Excellent outcomes among HIV+ children on ART, but unacceptably high pre-ART mortality and losses to follow-up: a cohort study from Cambodia

Version: 3 Date: 19 June 2009

Reviewer: Margaret May

Reviewer’s report:

Major compulsory revisions

1) Table 2 is incorrect. The person time up to 90 days is < person time up to 180 days < total fup. But it is the same for all 3 time periods in the table. The rates are also wrong (presumably because the fup time denominator is wrong). The rates should be:

20/168 = 12%
27/322 = 8%
39/1443 = 3%

Similarly for children not on ART the rates are wrong.

Arguably it is more informative (or additionally informative) to give rates for time periods eg

0-90 days rate =12%
90-180 days rate = 5%
>180 days rate = 1%

Similarly for children not on ART.

2) Fig 2 is not very informative as it stands and could be omitted. At the very least the scale could be changed eg plot incidence of mortality (survival upside down) and use scale 0 to 0.20.

Could add survival of children not on ART for comparison, but need to censor at start of treatment. Need to explain that sicker children more likely to start ART so there is selection of those not on ART for long times.

3) I do not like fig 4 because it adds nothing to stating the proportions in the text. It shows the outcomes at the end of fup, but the length of fup is different for each child. Labels need clarifying. Does “on ART” mean “STARTED ART DURING FUP” and “not on ART” mean “NEVER RECEIVED ART”? It would be better to give cross-sectional outcomes at 1 year after enrollment for the subgroup of children with at least 1 year of potential fup. This is more meaningful for comparison with other programs.
**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'