Reviewer’s report

Title: Five-year mortality in a cohort of people with schizophrenia in rural Ethiopia.

Version: 1 Date: 31 August 2011

Reviewer: John McGrath

Reviewer’s report:

This is a well conducted and well written paper describing the 5 year mortality in an Ethiopian population based prevalence sample of schizophrenia. There is a lack of data from the developing world on mortality and the ability to link case deaths with background population deaths is a major strength of the paper.

Minor Essential Revisions:

1. The age range for the prevalence study was 15 to 49 years. In western countries much of the schizophrenia-related mortality is due to poor life style and medication side effects, which contribute to long-latency health problems (e.g. cancer, cardiovascular disease). These many only emerge decades after illness onset. How might the truncated age range impact on the interpretation of the Ethiopian results?

2. It would help the general reader to learn more about the particular health problems found in Butajiri region of rural Ethiopia. It is noted that malnutrition was a common cause of death in the patient group - was that a concern for the district during the follow-up period? Similarly, what is the seroprevalence for HIV, what percent of the population have TB etc. In Western nations, there is evidence that the rate for some disease is comparable in schizophrenia and controls, but access to treatment is not.

3. Page 13. The fact that the sample is based on prevalent cases does not lead to over-estimates of SMR, but underestimates. You have to be alive to be included in prevalence samples, and thus the risk set included in this 5 year follow-up would be depleted of cases who died prematurely.

4. Can the authors speculate on how representative their data are - would the SMRs be comparable to those in dense urban regions, or compared to other semi-rural regions adjacent countries?

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