Reviewer's report

Title: Changing clinical needs of people living with AIDS and receiving home based care in Malawi - the Bangwe Home Based Care Project 2003-2008 - a descriptive study

Version: 1 Date: 12 October 2009

Reviewer: John Aberle-Grasse

Reviewer's report:

When assessing the work, please consider the following points:
1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
3. Are the data sound?
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
9. Is the writing acceptable?

Please make your review as constructive and detailed as possible in your comments so that authors have the opportunity to overcome any serious deficiencies that you find and please also divide your comments into the following categories:
• Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)
  o P3, pp2- change to ‘but began to became available free of charge in Malawi in 2005.’
  o P4, Data Collected, last sentence- ‘recorded as appropriate.’
  o P5 1st sentence- ‘were enrolled’ since it is analysis of routine program data, patients did not enroll in study, otherwise you would need ethical approval
  o P5, HIV test status, 1st sentence- ‘in Malawi, over the time period studied.’
  o P8 3rd sentence- ‘But WHO staging at initial visit was no different over the 6 years.’
  o P8-‘perhaps due to either stabilisation by home based care treatment.’
• Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use
of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
o P4, Study period and sample- assuming all lost to follow up are dead is likely over estimate and should be noted

o In Discussion- I would suggest that results show HBC as supportive of ART initiation in areas where access to ART remains limited, and that greater encouragement of ART initiation should be part of HBC

• Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

o Table 1- Shouldn’t the number patients ‘referred for ART’ at least equal patients with initial WHO stage 3 and 4; this should at least be discussed

o Program growth in 2008 should be explained, maybe effecting survival results

o P7, Survival- survival in 2008 was notably low from fig 3 and table 1, should be discussed, 51% died

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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'