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: 3 Date: 11 May 2010

Reviewer: Elizabeth Marum

Reviewer's report:

Minor issues not for publication:
Authors have improved English but a few corrections are still needed. In Antiretroviral therapy section (now page 6), (48% of) still remains. Also paragraph 6 in discussion section, last sentence should be "This issue warrants..." Also in para 6 in discussion section, the term "old patients" is used. Does this refer to elderly patients or already enrolled patients? Please go through manuscript and try to clean up these English issues.

There are also some confusing dates about when ART become available. Page 13, Introduction, para 3, statement is made that ART program was established in Malawi in 2005. But in methods section, para 4, page 4, statement is made that first occasion a registered patient started ART was 15 March 2004. Please clarify these dates. I believe the correct history is that ART was available on a limited basis in 2003 and 2004 and greatly expanded in 2005.

Discretionary Revisions: Paragraph 6 in discussion section is not clear. Since the population of the catchment area (100,000) is given, it would also be helpful to estimate the number of persons living with HIV in the catchment area, which would put the number of new patients accessing HBC (4 to 5 weekly) in context. The statement is made in paragraph 7 that the number of new patients seeking HBC has reduced by less than 10% a year but this statistic may be misleading since the number of new patients appears to have fluctuated considerably from a low of 174 in 2004 to a high of 290 in 2006. It would be more helpful to the reader to point out the data in Table one showing a sharp drop from 290 new patients in 2006 (when ART services were apparently still limited) to 129 in 2008 (when ART was more widely available in Malawi). This sharp drop in the numbers of newly enrolled HBC patients does not support the statement in paragraph 1 of the Discussion section that the number of HBC patients had not changed as much as might have been expected. In fact, this reduction of over 50% in new patients from 2006 to 2008 is exactly what was expected with expanding ART programs. However, the intensity of needed visits does support the statement that the clinical needs of patients have not changed as much as expected.

Goal of the paper is to describe the changing pattern of HBC and it appears to this reviewer that with ART availability, the actual number of new patients enrolling in HBC has declined considerably but the number of visits and services
needed may have increased. This trend does not come out clearly in the
discussion as currently written.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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.