Reviewer's report

Title: What happens to ART-eligible patients who do not start ART? Dropout between screening and ART initiation: a cohort study in Karonga, Malawi

Version: 1 Date: 6 July 2010

Reviewer: Viviane Dias Lima

Reviewer's report:

Paper Objective
The authors investigated the disease outcomes of individuals eligible to start ART but not receiving it in an ART program in Malawi. They also investigated the reasons for dropping out or not starting this ART program.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Introduction
• Please provide background information for this population, i.e., yearly incidence, prevalence and mortality associated with HIV.

Methods
• In the sentences “No CD4 tests were available at the hospital laboratory. Therefore, eligibility was usually determined using WHO stage.” The word usually is confusion, if not CD4 eligibility or WHO stage, what else did you use for eligibility?
• What sort of questions were asked in the interview?
• Did the regimen provided to all these individuals contain stavudine plus lamivudine plus nevirapine?
• Please describe (and define is appropriate) which socio-demographic and clinical information were gathered in these individuals. Assuming that you have more than one possible factor to make into your multivariable model, how did you select the final model? This is an explanatory model, please mention this as well.
• How does this clinic compare with other ones in the region?

Results
• In the first sentence, you mentioned between parenthesis the numbers 13 and 4, please rewrite using N=13 and N=4. It gets confusing with the style of references in this paper.
• In the third sentence in the first paragraph, how late is late? What is the median (IQR) follow-up time that people started ART at a later time?
• If a patient had a contraindication to treatment, what happen to this patient?
• The table is quite messy. Please re-organize it.
• You mentioned the univariable model results. I would drop it and mentioned the
distribution of the population regarding the different factors. Then, I would go
directly to the multivariable results.
• In the education, please situate the grades with the western world. It is easier to
make comparisons like this.
• Define acronyms used in the text, table and figure.
• How many people died without assessing ART?
• Please revise the grammar.
• Do you have demographic information on the individuals that you have not
included in this study? How different were them in comparison to the ones
included in the study?

Discussion
• This paper is missing on the policy implications of the results.
• Most of your conclusions do not fit with the data provided. Please re-write it.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.