Reviewer’s report

Title: Prevalence of HIV among MSM in Europe: comparison of self-reported diagnoses from a large scale internet survey and existing national estimates

Version: 2 Date: 25 September 2012

Reviewer: Chris Beyrer

Reviewer’s report:

This is well done and well reported study on an important topic: a comparison on internet based HIV prevalence estimates for MSM in Europe with existing national estimates.

There are no compulsory revisions, but suggested revisions include the following.

1. There is some lack of clarity in the use of national versus city prevalence rates. For many "national" estimates of HIV prevalence in MSM, capitol or major city are assumed to prevail for the total population. This should be clarified throughout the text. This relates as well to the question of the proportion of men in a population who are MSM. The authors have chosen 3%, which may be high, and reflect an urban bias, but do not that for countries with less open and accepted MSM populations the rates may be lower. This should be addressed, perhaps in the discussion.

2. The internet self reports do indeed correlate well with the existing national estimates, but they consistently tended to over-estimate the prevalence, and the magnitude (roughly 100%) was markedly consistent across the samples. The authors pay more attention to the correlation, and less to the over-estimate, but surely the latter is more relevant for planning services, budgets and the like. Strongly suggest that they address the bias in the discussion, and suggest ways it might be addressed.

3. There is little description of the efforts to promote the survey, and in other disease models internet surveys have tended to be more expensive and labor intensive than expected, due to the need to motivate use of the survey. Was this an issue? More detail here might assist other groups considering doing similar kinds of comparisons in other MSM settings.

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 I have no competing interests.