Reviewer's report

Title: Exposure, reach and impact of a mass media campaign targeting sexual health amongst Scottish men who have sex with men: a pragmatic outcome evaluation

Version: 1 Date: 9 April 2013

Reviewer: Garrett Prestage

Reviewer's report:

This is a very well-written paper that covers the topic area and reports the data very effectively. I have few reservations about this paper

Major Compulsory Revisions:

Given that participation in the 'gay scene' was associated with exposure to the campaign it is probably worth noting that men who are more highly engaged in gay community life may also be more likely to actively seek out this sort of material. Their awareness of the campaign may not be only because they were more likely to encounter it.

There is a broader issue about the capacity to evaluate the impact of a campaign of this nature in a context of high levels of knowledge and motivation that should be noted. The demand for more, and more rigorous, evaluative work usually fails to acknowledge this context and ignores the potential impact on maintenance of current levels of knowledge and motivation. Mostly, the expectation is for a positive outcome - a change in behavior or knowledge or attitude. However, this may not be feasible in some circumstances, but it may well be that in the absence of this sort of work, long-term, there may be some decline in these desired outcomes.

Minor Essential Revisions:

The term 'non-scene' appears before it is explained in the methods. A brief explanation should appear on its first mention.

The 'non-scene' locations for the campaign need a bit more clarification: Were these 'non-scene' locations city-wide or were they concentrated in venues and services that may nonetheless have had a large gay clientele?

Discretionary Revisions:

The background material to this paper is fairly comprehensive, and mostly it is quite relevant. Nonetheless, I did feel there were a few points that were not really essential for the argument in this paper. Perhaps a bit tighter focus on evaluating mass media campaigns would be warranted.

My second discretionary concern relates to the description of the sample as 'MSM'. Given that this is a sample recruited through gay venues and the
interventions are evaluated relative to their gay scene and 'non-scene' deployment, the characterization of the sample as being broadly that of any man who has sex with men is misleading. It is a pity that you have not reported on the men’s own sexual identity. Nonetheless, at the very least, it would be useful to acknowledge that the men in this sample are likely to be mostly gay-identified men who participate in gay community life.

**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'