Reviewer’s report

Title: Acceptability of self-collection sampling for HPV-DNA testing in low-resource settings: a mixed methods approach

Version: 2  Date: 6 November 2013

Reviewer: Lindley Barbee

Reviewer’s report:

This manuscript describes a mixed methods study, nested in a larger cervical cancer screening demonstration project, designed to assess the acceptability of self-sampling for HPV for cervical cancer prevention from the perspective of both patients and providers, and to gather data on what might make this testing method more acceptable and feasible for future role out of this process. Although women’s acceptability of self-sampling is not a novel topic, the findings are interesting in that some of them are contrary many previous results. One of the most interesting findings of this study is the difference in acceptability between the different study sites, which are representative of widely different cultures.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

DISCUSSION

1. The major conclusion that the authors draw from their findings is that 90% of women in these three countries found self-sampling to be acceptable. This is an overstatement of the findings. Although 90% women who completed exit interviews completed a vaginal self-sample, on the whole, the data from this study do not suggest that 90% of women find this acceptable. In fact, in Table 2, in the aggregate, 77.5% preferred self-sampling. And, in certain populations, i.e. Nicaragua, self-sampling was not acceptable to 50% of women. In addition, since the women had already agreed to participate in a study on cervical cancer screening, and if a proper informed consent was done they would have known self-sampling was part of the procedures, then the true measure of acceptability, in these terms, would be the number of women who agreed to participate in the study from all invited. Please qualify these findings.

Discretionary Revisions:

INTRODUCTION:

1. In the second paragraph, the authors state that CareHPV is cost-effective because has a “lower cost per test”. Compared to what? To other HPV tests? Please explain.

2. Paragraph 3: the authors state that self-collected vaginal HPV tests are “10-19%” less sensitive than provider collected specimens – that could mean either 65 – 90% sensitive, or 74 – 81% sensitive. Suggest rephrasing.

3. suggest using “speculum” exam, or “speculum based pap smear” instead of “pap smear procedure”. Technically Pap smear refers to the pathologic review of
cytology.
4. verb tense changes. Consider revising
5. Paragraph 4: Five studies is more than a “few”. Suggest using a different descriptor.
6. Paragraph 4, second line: the word “more” suggests comparison, but unclear what is being compared.
7. The first objective, which is actually two, is confusing as written. Consider making two separate objectives.

METHODS:
1. Since the manuscript describing the parent demonstration project is not yet published, suggest the authors provide more detail in the methods about its study design, objectives etc. As part of that description, strongly suggest a more detailed explanation of the collecting brush that women used for self-sampling, and the instructions that were given to women on how to collect the sample. Was there a visual educational tool? If so, consider adding that as a figure.
2. Suggest using subheadings both in methods and results to organize the sections.
3. Please describe how the study population was selected. In the methods section it states that a 20% random sample was selected, but the description of the study population in the results makes it seem that it was by chance that there was a 20% response rate. Was 20% pre-specified and if women refused to participate, were more invited?

RESULTS
4. Again, suggest subheadings to help organize this section. In particular, the manuscript moves from study population of the interviews/FGDs, directly to a paragraph on the surveys. But, the lead-in phrase calls them “exit interview sites” which is confusing with the interviews described above.

DISCUSSION
5. Why did self-sampling seem unacceptable to women in Nicaragua, whereas women in Uganda were happy to self-sample? This is a very interesting finding. Suggest the authors comment on these cultural differences in the discussion section.
6. Please expand on the limitation about the population chosen for the interviews and FGDs, as sampling from women who had to return for an abnormal pap results leads to a biased sample.

Minor essential revisions:

BACKGROUND
1. word “cost” prior to reference 2 should be “costs”
2. Figures 1 and 2: please label with N study subjects in this part of the analysis, unclear which group of women is being presented.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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.