Reviewer's report

Title: Most women diagnosed with cervical cancer by a visual screening program in Tanzania completed treatment: evidence from a retrospective cohort study

Version: 1 Date: 19 January 2014

Reviewer: Matejka Rebolj

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting study describing characteristics of women with cervical cancer presenting for “screening” at the ORCI in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The amount of effort that was needed to secure the necessary data seems remarkable, and the discussion of the results is comprehensive. I have a few comments:

Major compulsory revisions:
- The description of sources of data and their completeness is difficult to follow. What I miss is a clear description of which data sources were used by calendar year, and the completeness of these data. The study covers the period of Nov 2002-Jun 2011. Whether a woman was referred from screening to treatment of invasive disease was defined based on her patient records, diagnostics records, colposcopy records. But biopsy log books were not available before Mar 2005, and patient log books were not available for 2006. 1) Does this mean that before Mar 2005, some patients with invasive cervical cancer may have been not accounted for, and thus those that were accounted for were a selected group? 2) The authors state that “The 2006 patient log book was unavailable, so all 2006 records (n=2,549) were reviewed to identify cervical cancer cases.” From which source were “all 2006 records” retrieved? I would suggest that the whole process of data collection, including sources, numbers and completeness, be included in a revised Figure 1.
- The authors use the term “screening”, however, is that a correct term given that all women with cervical cancer presented with symptoms, sometimes even after prior treatment at a different institution? I would suggest finding a different phrase for this activity because it can be misleading, even though it showed some characteristics typical for screening (e.g. diagnosis at an earlier stage).

Minor essential revisions
- The authors stated that “At ORCI, most women screened by VIA also undergo colposcopy” – please explain why this is the case.
- Could the authors present some indicator of the distribution of the follow-up and treatment duration times?

Discretionary revisions:
- If all women in the study presented at “screening” with symptoms, this suggests
that no cases of cervical cancer were found in symptomless women. How often do symptomless women have CIN diagnosed?

**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 am working on a study of HPV assays including a collaboration with Qiagen, Roche, Genomica and Hologic/Gen-Probe. These companies provided assays and limited co-funding for laboratory material. I have received no salary or bonuses from any of the companies. I received honoraria from Qiagen for lectures.