Reviewer's report

Title: Patient and health service delay in the diagnosis and start of treatment of pulmonary tuberculosis in Ethiopia

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Reviewer: Dr Stephen Lawn

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Other (see below)

Details from the local TB programme guidelines of how smear-positive and smear-negative TB are diagnosed should be included in the materials and methods section.

The extremely short health service delay in this setting compared to previously published studies is still striking and somewhat surprising. The fact that health service delay was short even among smear-negative patients is an important finding and the authors should make the recommendation that the TB programme needs to review the way diagnoses of smear negative TB are being made.

The authors should include in the methods section that investigation and treatment of TB at the government clinics is free of charge - this is an important issue with regards to patient delay.

Point 8 in my original review has not been adequately addressed. Regarding Tables 1, a single P value is given for comparison of smear positive and smear negative groups. There should be a P value for each line of the table corresponding to each of the stratified delays. Furthermore, the table would be much improved if the number and % patients were given in each of 3 columns for 'smear-positives', 'smear negatives' and 'total patients'.

'Haemoptysis' is consistently misspelled throughout the manuscript.

The authors have addressed adequately the majority of the issues originally raised and the manuscript is acceptable with the above revisions.

Competing interests:

None declared.