Reviewer's report

Title: Re-emerging syphilis: a detrended correspondence analysis of the behaviour of HIV positive and negative gay men

Version: 2 Date: 22 August 2003

Reviewer: Michael Rekart

Reviewer's report:

General - In this short survey of a small sample of gay men, the authors showed higher risk behaviors for men with syphilis alone and syphilis plus HIV. The authors go on to state that a significant proportion of those without syphilis (25-61%) also exhibited high risk behavior. These findings are predictable and the conclusions are limited by several factors: small sample size, little information on the sampling strategy, including the lack of epidemiologic information on decliners; no pre-study behavioral data to which the subjects can be compared; and no discussion of the limitations of this study.

Discretionary Revisions - The authors should state their hypothesis clearly and identify the nature of this study (i.e. cross-sectional, observational, ecological, etc).

Minor Compulsory Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached):
1. Details on the sampling strategy - How were subjects selected; why the high refusal rate; how did refusers differ from volunteers, etc.
2. Short description of detrended correspondence analysis (DCA).
3. Display the 'raw' data from the univariate analysis so that readers can draw their own conclusions.
4. Add 'limitations' section.
5. Is their data available from other cohorts or previous years to which the authors can compare the current results?
6. Give details on condom use.

Advice on publication: Reject because too small an advance

Level of interest: A paper of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests:

None