Reviewer's report

Title: Patterns of delays amongst pulmonary tuberculosis patients in Lagos, Nigeria.

Version: 1 Date: 14 February 2004

Reviewer: Marieke van der Werf

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors have performed a delay study using a methodology also applied by many other research groups performing delay studies. The results are interesting if used for improving tuberculosis control in Nigeria. The reviewer would appreciate it if the questionnaire used for the patient interviews is also published on the internet.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. The authors state in the introduction section that ‘they are not aware of any previous study in Nigeria that has investigated the causes and patterns of delay’. The reviewer is aware of a study published in 2002 by Enwuru et al. (Care-seeking behavioural patterns, awareness and diagnostic processes in patients with smear- and culture-positive pulmonary tuberculosis in Lagos, Nigeria. Trans R Soc Trop Med Hyg 96: 614-6) that does have causes and patterns of delay as main subject. The reviewer thinks it necessary that this article is mentioned in the introduction of the article and that differences in outcomes of this study compared with the study in the manuscript are discussed in the discussion section.

2. From the methods section it is not clear which patients are included in the study
   a) A TB case is one who is smear-positive on at least two samples (Methods section - Background)
   b) Newly diagnosed pulmonary tuberculosis (Methods section - Study design)
   c) Chest X-ray suggestive of tuberculosis (Results section - Diagnosis of TB)
   d) Sputum positive smear (Results section - Diagnosis of TB)

   The reviewer considers it important that the authors state exactly which type of patients were included in the Methods section, e.g. newly diagnosed sputum smear positive pulmonary tuberculosis patients.

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

1. Please clarify the sentence ‘Prospective study using a health worker administered protocol and laboratory investigations’ in the Abstract.
2. Remove ‘amongst’ from the one but last sentence of the Background section.
3. Change (p=0.000) to (p=<0.001) in the Patterns of delays paragraph of the Results section.
4. Please clarify the sentence ‘The delay by patients may be (due???) to lack of information about TB and that the disease was treated at no cost to the patient’ in the Discussion section.
5. Remove typing error from reference 5.
6. Give Table 1 a more descriptive title, e.g. Source of first consultation of new pulmonary TB
patients in Lagos, Nigeria.
7. Give Table 2 a more descriptive title, e.g. Patient, doctor, treatment and total delay in weeks (mean and median) of new pulmonary TB patients in Lagos, Nigeria.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. The first paragraph of the Background is too long. Information about causes of TB and the role of HIV is not necessary for understanding this study.
2. The authors use very old references (1991 and 1993) to describe the importance of TB. More recent references will be appreciated by the reviewer.
3. The reviewer would appreciate it if there is a table summarizing patient characteristics. This table can include the information mentioned in the ‘socio-demographic characteristics of patients’ paragraph of the Results section.
4. It is not clear to the reviewer what a positive cough contact is (mentioned in the Diagnosis of TB paragraph of the Results section).
5. The authors have chosen to compare their study with a limited number of comparable studies. The reviewer is aware of many more studies investigating delay. A comparison or reference to these studies would improve the introduction and discussion section. The reviewer lists some of the references below:


What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

None