Reviewer's report

Title: Health-seeking behaviour of human brucellosis cases in rural Tanzania

Version: 3 Date: 6 June 2007

Reviewer: Pablo C Baldi

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper explores the health-seeking behaviour of individuals affected by brucellosis in rural Tanzania. The paper was originally sent to BMC Medicine and was considerably longer, including information on clinical features and treatment of cases. In this revised shortened version authors have focused exclusively on the "health-seeking behaviour" of patients and have almost completely eliminated any mention to clinical and treatment aspects. Therefore, many of the concerns I raised on the original version do not apply to this revised version. However, in shortening the manuscript some important data have been excluded, and should be added to improve the interest of the paper. Recommended changes are detailed below.

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

- In my first review I recommended the authors to analyze the potential contribution of presentation symptoms (specially symptom severity) to the patient delay for seeking medical treatment. This recommendation has not been followed in this revised version. This factor should be analyzed, specially now that the paper has focused on the reasons for a delayed health-seeking behaviour.

- Likewise, while the paper focuses on factors determining a delayed health-seeking, no mention is made in Materials and Methods regarding the procedure employed and the staff involved in obtaining relevant information (e.g., knowledge of brucellosis, keeps livestock, level of education, economic status). Moreover, one of the variables included in Table 1 is "if any suffered from brucellosis". Does it mean "previous brucellosis"? If so, authors should clarify whether previous brucellosis was documented by clinical records or was referred by the patient.

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

- Any mention to serological tests performed in local hospitals before submission of samples to the VLA has been deleted from Materials and Methods or Results in this revised version. The general situation regarding brucellosis serological tests in sub-Saharan Africa is mentioned in the Introduction, but no details are given regarding the use of such tests in the population studied. Authors should comment on that, since in the Results section they mention that "health system delay was a result of false negative results, causing failure to diagnose 22 cases of brucellosis on their first visit to hospitals". False negative results are rare in acute brucellosis. Therefore, authors should clarify which tests were used and whether these false negatives corresponded to acute or chronic brucellosis cases. This will contribute to delineate a more clear picture of the reasons for the delay in brucellosis diagnosis in the region under study.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions
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.