Reviewer's report

Title: Designing and Conducting Tabletop Exercises to Assess Public Health Preparedness

Version: 1 Date: 31 October 2006

Reviewer: Edbert Hsu

Reviewer's report:

General

This is a well-written manuscript that addresses an important topic in the field. Though tabletop exercises are increasingly utilized, the literature supporting their effectiveness remains sparse. The paper describes a series of 31 tabletops and identifies several consistent themes. As pointed out by the authors, there is a need to move beyond qualitative performance measures to establishing quantifiable measures for public health preparedness.

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

None

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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. The title should be revised to reflect that the tabletops focused on bioterrorism or infectious agents, as opposed to other types of high-impact public health emergencies.

2. pg. 5 What items were included on the exercise evaluation forms completed by the participants?

3. pg. 8 "Exercises should be designed to fulfill a specific objective."

4. Based on the authors’ experience, please include in the discussion some suggested examples of quantifiable performance measures.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Please expand Table 1 to specify additional information that identifies each tabletop conducted by geographic location, agent/disease exercised, types of participants, facilitator involvement, etc.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.