Reviewer's report

Title: Tackling tuberculosis patients' internalized social stigma through patient centred care: An intervention study in rural Nicaragua

Version: 1 Date: 14 February 2008

Reviewer: John DH Porter

Reviewer's report:

This is an important piece of work that manages to take forward the broader socio-economic issues contained within TB control. The statement at the end of the summary on page 1 is very pertinent, namely "TB care should also focus on the TB patient’s wellbeing and not solely on TB epidemic control.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Page 9, 10. It would be useful to have more information on the bias around the collection of the information for the stigma scale. For example, were subjects aware of the process and the importance of a change between their initial response and their second response? How did you deal with this? How was the information collected?

2. Information on ethics review

- Minor Essential Revisions

3. The paper begins with the word "we". Who is this? Does it include the government?

4. There needs to be greater clarity around the study versus the work of the National TB Control Programme in Nicaragua. A positive aspect of this work is the close relationship that is apparent between the researchers and the NTP, but it is difficult to understand what roles are being played by the different groups and how this came about. For example, did the researchers approach the government or did the government approach the researchers knowing the type of work they conducted? Did the government conceive the concept of TB clubs, or was this the work of the researchers?

5. Page 2. First paragraph line 10. Need to make it clear that you have chosen to refer to "internalized stigma" rather than "perceived stigma".

6. Page 2 Second paragraph. Last line. What do you mean by equilibrating power sharing between health personnel and patients?

7. Page 2. Methods. 3rd paragraph last line. What contextual factors are you talking about?

8. Page 3 Second paragraph. "because of their need to be strengthened". How is this going to happen. The issues you are discussing
are not the classical TB indicators.

9. Page 3. The process before the implementation. Important link with the government. More clarity on this process would be useful. I presume that the government was interested in linking with the research questions?

10. Page 3. Last paragraph. Need more information on patient centred home visits. What do they consist of? How will they lead to the changes you are looking for?

11. Page 4. First paragraph, last line. How does reference 16 links with references 17 and 18?

12. Page 4. Outcome measurement. First paragraph we adapted a scale to measure the TB internalized social stigma. What do these look like? Refer to table. Need to have some idea of the scale before you describe how it was constructed.

13. Page 5. Operational analysis more information on what this is.

14. Page 5. Context exploration and intervention design. Who were the external researchers? You?

15. Page 5. Introduction of the intervention package. I think the package includes all 3 components stated on page 3?

16. Page 7. Lots of context specific information. Are there certain themes that come through in the analysis?

17. References. Need to have full references note 1, 19, 26.

18. Figure 1 page 13. Can you expand this figure to provide more information on the process?

19. There is no information on ethics review of this proposal. Was the proposal reviewed? If so, by whom? What is the process for ethics review?

What next?

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Based on your assessment of the validity of the manuscript, what do you advise should be the next step?

- Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions. It would also be useful to have more information on the partnership with the Government.

Level of interest

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- An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English

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- Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review
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- No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests
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'I declare that I have no competing interests'

Open peer review
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Submission of this report is taken as confirmation that you are happy for your signed report to be posted on the BMC Public Health website as part of the pre-publication history of this article.

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