Reviewer’s report

Title: Use of Traditional Complementary and Alternative Medicine (TCAM) for HIV patients prior initiating antiretroviral therapy in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Version: 2 Date: 12 May 2008

Reviewer: Patrice K Nicholas

Reviewer's report:

Discretionary Revisions

These are recommendations for improvement which the author can choose to ignore. For example clarifications, data that would be useful but not essential.

Review:

This is an exceptional manuscript that merits publication.

The background is very well written and addresses the importance of investigating the use of TCAM in South Africa since these modalities are frequently used by those individuals with HIV/AIDS. There is a comprehensive review of the use of TCAM in Africa. The aim of the study is clearly stated on page 4.

The Methods section addresses the design and that the study is cross-sectional in nature and inclusive of all treatment naive patients (who were about to commence ART) recruited from all three public hospitals in Uthukela health district in KwaZulu-Natal. The sampling method is clear and the enrollment methods well described. Ethical issues and IRB approval are clear. The outcome measurea and all instruments are described including the high reliability estimate for the SSC-HIV rev (.95). Where described, reliability estimates for other instruments were also relatively high. No reliability data are described for the Health Beliefs instrument and if possible, this could be included prior to publication of the manuscript.

The results section is very well done with comprehensive demographics, background on helath information including symptoms and an overview of the TCAM approaches that participants used. I found this section fascinating as I have a particular interest in this area. The univariate and multivariate analyses were excellent. The Discussion section was enlightening and addressed the utilization, cost and other variables related to TCAM. I congratulate the authors and look forward to seeing the publication in press.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

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.