Reviewer's report

Title: Effects of a short individually tailored counselling session for HIV prevention in gay and bisexual men receiving Hepatitis B vaccination

Version: 2 Date: 27 February 2009

Reviewer: Curtis Dolezal

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Major Issues:

1) The lack of randomization is a limitation. There was an increase in risk behavior among the controls. Since they were from different cities from the intervention group, it is difficult to conclude that this had anything to do with a lack of intervention.

2) The sexual risk assessment covered a 6-month period. However, the average time between the intervention and the follow-up was 5.6 months. This means that, for a large proportion of the sample, the time period assessed included sexual behavior prior to the intervention. So if someone was having unprotected sex prior to the intervention, even if they totally stopped it after the intervention, they would still have to report having engaged in unprotected sex. Given the crude measurement (never to always) I think this is a problem.

3) The attrition rates are extremely high. At a minimum, those who dropped out should have been compared to those who remained in the study on their risk behavior, etc. at baseline. Such a large attrition rate would be a little more tolerable if it could be demonstrated that they were not systematically different from study competitors.

4) The approach to a change in steady partner status is not very informative. Those who lost, gained, or changed a steady partner were all combined into one group. As a result, it is impossible to see how the type of relationship change is related to behavior change.

5) Most of the details of Table 3 are of little interest. As a group, those who reported no risk at baseline were more likely to show an increase in risk. As a group, those who reported risky sex at baseline were more likely to show a decrease in risk. This is a basic regression to the mean finding, so it is not surprising that it was found for both intervention and controls.

6) Throughout the discussion there are claims that the intervention reduced unsafe sex. This is really an overstatement as the reduction in risk across partner types was -0.04. Four one-hundredths of a change on a scale of 0-8 hardly qualifies as a notable reduction. If that were so, then it would have to be claimed that the intervention increased unsafe sex with steady partners, for there the intervention group showed an increase of the same amount (0.04).
Minor issue:

7) Some additional detail would be useful in the calculation of the partner specific risk scores. If someone did not have a steady partner, were they coded as 'no unprotected sex with steady partner' or excluded from the analyses. From the Ns in table 2, it looks like the former. Also check the Ns in table 2 as more are reported in table 2b (UAI with casual partners) than in 2a (UAI with casual and steady partners combined).

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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 I have no competing interests