Reviewer’s report

Title: Palliative care making a difference in rural Uganda, Kenya and Malawi: three rapid evaluation field studies

Version: 1 Date: 13 December 2010

Reviewer: Faith Mwangi-Powell

Reviewer’s report:

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The focus of the paper is on end-of-life care, while in Africa palliative care is seen as appropriate from the point of diagnosis and not restricted to end of life care. Therefore and while this is ok as it is the focus of the paper it is important to mention this wider concept of palliative care in Africa and to say that the paper only looks at end of life care.

2. Given the limitations of the rapid evaluation methodology, the authors need to be cautious with their conclusions (e.g. under conclusion in Pg 3, ln 21: ‘Programmes were successful …’ given the challenge of indicating service impact and outcome with a study design that does not have a control group etc.).

3. Pg 5, section 2: how were interviewees selected and how were the sample size determined (thematic saturation)? What are ‘question outlines’? Questions? Would be good to cite these questions in an appendix, too

4. Pg 5, section 3: how were the quality of PC and counselling provided assessed? Were there standardised guidelines or more subjective

5. Pg 5, last sentence prior to the ‘Results’ section: whilst permission was granted by the relevant hospital boards, was there no permission in each country from the national ethics bodies (a requirement), such as KEMRI in Kenya and UNCST in Uganda. If it was granted, it needs to be include as this might jeopardise the ethical issues around this study. If the permissions were not required it need to be mentioned.

6. For the methods section, how were the data analysed, were coding frames used etc, and who was involved (one person, more than one), and was the interpretation of the data presented back to interviewees for validation purposes?

7. In the course of this paper, there appears to be no observational data reported. This could be outlined in the methods section so readers are not looking for it (i.e. say what you are presenting

-Minor Essential Revisions

8. Pg 3, ln 20: ‘palliative care’ rather than ‘palliative project’?

9. Pg 4, ln 4: should be ‘Hospice Africa Uganda’.

10. Pg 4, ref 4: could consider also citing the Cape Town declaration.
11. Pg 4, ref 6: is the UNAIDS citation appropriate?

12. Pg 4, after the introduction and study aim, I would suggest going to the Methods section and having a sub-section titled something like ‘Settings’ and then expand in detail on each site, but giving precise figures for such statements as ‘each in a country with high HIV prevalence’, and with statements like ‘a three hour journey from …’, use kilometres as this journey time will vary. If possible, a small table outlining the key aspects of the cites (e.g. rural, peri-urban etc) would be helpful to pull out commonalities and differences easily for the reader.

13. Pg 4, third paragraph on: there are no references for this information, including the one in Kenya which gives a local HIV prevalence figure estimated at 12-15%. If references exist, they should be cited, even if they are official service provider publications.

14. Pg 5, ln 6: ‘Multidisciplinary team’ could be defined in terms of its exact composition.

15. Pg 5, ln 13: Was the review of routine local information relevant to palliative care only as exhaustive as three patients, one of which is 12 years old?

16. Results section: Table 1 does not present a particularly helpful breakdown of the characteristics of interviewees. We know nothing of, for example, patient diagnoses, age, sex, how long volunteers have been in their role, etc, which could impact upon their responses.

17. Results section, Malawi: there is talk of ‘most’ and ‘many suffered’, but the vast majority of quotes are presented as singular in nature, apparently recording individual narratives rather than a majority opinion etc.

18. For the results section, I would suggest the use of thematic sub-headings to help the reader; this could be under each country.

19. Pg 8, ln 20: ‘A Ugandan volunteer also noted …’ should not be in italics.

20. Pg 9, ln 7: What is the multi-tasking nature of Kitovu palliative care team?

21. Pg 9, ln 21: Spelling error on ‘stigmastised’.

22. P 10, last but one line: should be ‘seeking health care’, not ‘seeking for health care’.

- Discretionary Revisions

23. Pg 3, ln 5: ‘studied’ rather than ‘studies’

24. Pg 7, ln 6: ‘said a wife’ should not be in italics

25. Pg 5, ln 9: WHO should be written in full, at least at first citation

26. Pg 9, Kenya section: For all the results section, authors should try to keep the descriptive details of each site in the suggested settings sub-section, and only use this for thematic results

27. Pg 9, ln 7: ‘You are a god …’, is a quote within a quote

28. Pg 11: There is repetition regarding the inability of the Maua programme to retain volunteers. Could be tightened.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

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