Reviewer's report

Title: "If you can't treat HPV, why test for it?" Women's attitudes to the changing face of cervical cancer prevention - a focus group study.

Version: 1 Date: 13 January 2014

Reviewer: Samuel O Obi

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Below are my comments on the manuscript which are mostly 'Discretionary Revision'

1. Topic: I think the first aspect of the topic 'If you can't treat HPV why test for it' should be deleted to make the title more focused.

2. Introduction (last paragraph). The justification for the study should be more specific:
   a) Whether the study wants to look at women's view on all aspects of cervical cancer prevention (cytology screening, HPV testing and HPV vaccination)
   b) Whether the study is specifically examining co-testing (primary screening HPV and cytology test)
   c) Whether the process of co-testing is already been practiced in Ireland or if it is still in the process of been introduced.
   d) Are there previous studies in Ireland or within the region on women's view on the subject matter? If such studies exist, the authors must highlight the findings to further provide justification for the current study.

3. Methods
   a) 1st paragraph “cervical check was rolled out in September 2008............” (i) Is the country in the process of introducing co-testing to warrant the study? (ii) Any prior sensitization of the populace on the new form of testing before embarking on the focus group discussion? (iii) A brief description of the area of the study, its population, people etc will not be out of place.
   b) What sampling technique was used to ensure that the populace in the area under study (urban, mixed and rural) was equally recruited?
   c) How did you reduce bias in selection of participants in the focus group discussion? Was the selection only based on the women showing interest? Do you think advertisement on the media (electronic etc.) would have resulted in a more broad based participation in the study?
   d) Are the 59 women involved in the study the only ones that indicated interest in the study or did some drop out after initially indicating interest? If the latter is true, how many?
   e) Any calculated sample size for the study?
   f) I have some reservations on the time interval between provision of information/
education on HPV for the participants and the subsequent focus group discussion. (i) I personally think the participants should have been provided with all the necessary information on HPV etc. at least 1-2 months earlier to enable them sought for clarifications on the subject matter from different experts before arrangements for the focus group discussion is scheduled. The low level of knowledge about HPV by the participants most probably is attributable to the short interval (90-150 minutes) between provision of information and focus group discussion. This must have affected the findings in the primary and the sub-themes in the study. (ii) Furthermore, bias on the part of the trained facilitators cannot be ruled out completely.

4. Table 1 (last segment)

a) Private patients constituted about 70% of participants. (i) What are the cost implications of screening for both private and public patients especially for HPV testing? (ii) Is it possible that preponderance of private patient in the study could bias the view expressed?

5. Discussion

a) Conflicting statement: In 2nd paragraph “while a national cervical cancer screening programme was not in place in Ireland at the time of this study…………” In 1st paragraph in method “Organized cervical screening commenced in the Mid-western area in 2000 and the national programme, cervical check was rolled out in September 2008………….”

b) Role of HCPs and government (1st paragraph): The majority of women deferred responsibility for health………. NOT …deferred responsibly……..

c) Knowledge of HPV infection and HPV testing (1st paragraph) (i) Do you think that the many unanswered questions about HPV infection and cervical cancer would have been addressed with provision of information on HPV etc. over a longer time? (ii) Do you think that the psychological effect of HPV testing reported in the study is related to the short interval between provision and assimilation of information on HPV by the participants?

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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'