Reviewer's report

Title: Influences on visit retention in clinical trials: Insights from qualitative research during the VOICE trial in Johannesburg, South Africa

Version: 3  Date: 4 June 2014

Reviewer: Cynthia Woodsong

Reviewer's report:

I am keen to see this work published, and have no major compulsory revisions to suggest.

Minor Essential Revisions:
1. Since "serial ethnographic interviews" are not a standard methodology used in microbicide research, it would be helpful to provide a bit more information about these. For example - How does such an interview differ from an IDI, other than the interview is repeated? Why were serial ethnographic interviews conducted outside of the clinic?

2. "Mothers, daughters, partners -- social obligations to others" : Since the paper subsequently discusses additional types of social obligations, the authors might consider referring to obligations in this section as "familial" obligations. Also in this section, the authors say that "...male partners also supported women’s intentions..." but they do not indicate if this is all, most, or some partners. Further, in this paragraph, the authors state that the outreach team contacted male partners to reach the female participant, but they do not indicate if the female participant had given permission to do so, or if this was an understanding for all participants.

3. The sentence "However, when planning ahead was possible" could be rephrased to make it more clear that the trial made allowances for the provision of additional study supplies.

4. The authors might clarify what is meant by "a doctor's note from the trial clinic," and the circumstances under which this was provided. There is a later reference to a "clinic attendance letter," but it is not clear if this is the same thing as a doctor's note.

5. The clinic context: This section described the length of time people waited at the clinic, but it does not mention the transport time to and from the clinic. The authors might consider adding something about typical transport time.

6. In the discussion section, the third paragraph starts off with a statement about disclosure, but the relationship of disclosure to the rest of the paragraph is not clear. Doe the authors mean that informed family members and employers were more supportive of participation? What did the "negative experiences" (last sentence in this paragraph) have to do with disclosure?
Discretionary Revisions:

1. Abstract: It is a bit unusual to read an abstract with a methods and results section that is largely a list. The authors might consider casting this a bit differently.

2. The authors might avoid using the word "trialist," as it is jargon that may not be understood by a wider readership.

3. METHODS: In the first sentence, the authors should clarify that the VOICE trial site they associated with was in Hillbrow. The sentence currently reads "The VOICE trial was conducted in Hillbrow..." but earlier they stated that the VOICE trial was conducted in 3 countries (and there were multiple sites in South Africa).

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'