Reviewer's report

Title: Perspectives on the ethical concerns and justifications of the 2006 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention HIV testing: HIV screening policy changes

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Reviewer: Kjell Arne Johansson

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Review of the paper "Perspectives on the ethical concerns and justifications of the 2006 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention HIV testing: HIV screening policy changes"

This is an interesting analysis of four out of three changes that were made in the CDC revision of recommendations for HIV testing in clinical settings: (1) universal HIV screening, (2) HIV screening treated the same as screening for other treatable conditions, (3) increased HIV screening without assured additional funding for HIV care, and (4) making patients bear the costs of increased HIV screening. A qualitative method was used and 25 key persons from the public debate on the CDC guidelines were interviewed. Main findings were that universal HIV screening was perceived as ethically acceptable as long as the number of tested people increases and the nature of HIV was respected. Informants disagreed on whether testing ought to be favoured without additional funding to care. The conclusion is that fundamental ethical disagreements exist in the CDC document. The topic is within the journal's scope. The paper is not of satisfying quality for publication as it stands today, but it has a potential to qualify for publication with more efforts in the analysis of the interviews. Therefore, I recommend this paper to be published with Major Compulsory Revisions based on the comments below.

General comments

Qualitative methods seems to be a relevant method for this research question, but one of my main concerns with the paper as it stands today is that the analysis seems unfinished. More work needs to be done on the analysis. Themes, sub-themes and sub-sub-themes that were identified in the interviews are more or less listed and the reader zaps from theme to theme. The analysis could benefit from one or two extra rounds of analysis where the authors make decisions on which themes that are important to present under each of the headings. It is better to focus on fewer themes and go a bit more in detail to each of the themes. Give some citations so that the themes are recontextualised to the empirical data set. Since results and discussion are merged in this article, it is important to have some references to other literature on the same topic in this latter section. What is known from before in the literature on the particular theme? What does this study add to the discussion of this particular theme? I agree with the authors, as they say in the limitation, that qualitative methods
does not allow for weighing strengths of the arguments from the informants. However, the “discussion” section in a paper does, therefore I think more substantive efforts could be done to go into some of the key dilemmas and their arguments.

Methods: It is fine to refer to another article where the method has been described more in detail. However, it seems as if a template analysis style has been used and I miss a discussion on why this analysis method has been chosen rather than alternative analysis methods. What are the advantages/disadvantages of categorising themes under pre-specified headlines? The authors give some arguments for why benefits, risks/harms and patient rights are important, but more could be said about alternative templates.

Specific comments
- The objective of the paper is original, important and well defined.
- The paper has a good description of how the data collection was done.
- Perhaps one sentence on advantages/problems with telephone interviews.
- Tables: As they stand today, there are too much detail in them. I would recommend the authors to “kill their darlings” and remove at least 1/3 of the themes and help the reader to identify key findings. Personally, I don't like lists of themes in a table. I think the tables here are too premature. More narrow categories could be presented rather than all the “qualitative noise” often identified in the first round of analysis.

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