Author's response to reviews

Title: Voices from the frontline: Counsellors' perspectives on TB/HIV collaborative activities in the Northwest Region, Cameroon.

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Version: 2 Date: 26 August 2011

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POINT BY POINT RESPONSE TO REVIEWERS’ COMMENTS

Reviewer 1

1. Discretionary revisions

   The abstract has been restructured to accurately reflect the contents of the manuscript. Emphasis was placed on the research questions and the outline of the research findings.

2. Minor essential revisions
   
   i) The names of the study hospitals have been removed from the manuscript to decrease the chances of identifying participants in the study.

   ii) The “Background section” has been restructured with more emphasis on describing WHO’s recommendation for TB and HIV collaborative activities. Description of Cameroon’s national TB and HIV control programmes, and how joint TB/HIV services have been established are also provided. Details about TB and HIV medications previously included have been omitted to focus more on TB/HIV collaborative activities.

   iii) In the “Methods section”, a proper explanation of the composition and functions of the study hospitals, the rational for selecting the study hospitals (on pages 6 and 7), and the type of participants selected in the study have been provided in the “Data collection” sub-section (Pages 8-10).

The general models of TB and HIV care based on the national guidelines; and the specific hospital’s model of care based on its available resources have been described under the sub-section “TB/HIV care” on pages 7 and 8.

With regards to using several data sources to complement the findings of the study, observations from the HIV support group meetings have been included in the “Results section” (on page 21, lines 12-22; page 22, lines 1-3). Likewise, the double roles traditional healers play, both in undermining and complementing TB/HIV service delivery have been highlighted under the sub-section “Teamwork with the community” (on pages 18-20), and in the “Discussion section” (page 25, paragraph 1). The details of the traditional healers and the rationale for selecting them in the study are also included on page 9; paragraph 2.
3. Major compulsory revision
   i. The research questions have been clearly defined both in the abstract and in the main manuscript. The sections in the manuscript have therefore been restructured in line with the study objectives
   ii. The entire manuscript has been reviewed by a professional editing service for language correction
Reviewer 2

Comment 1. The “Background section” of the manuscript has been shortened and restructured were appropriate without compromising the key issues. Discussions surrounding WHO’s guidelines for providing joint TB and HIV services have been included. Descriptions of the national TB and HIV control programmes in Cameroon have also been provided.

Comments 2 and 5. In the “Methods section”, the composition, functions and rationale for selecting the study hospitals have been clearly stated (Pages 6 and 7). Issues of generalisability of the study findings have been discussed in the “Methodological consideration” sub-section on page 28.

Comment 3. An explanation of how “saturation” was achieved during data collection has been provided on page 9; paragraph 1 (lines 7-10).

Comment 4. Regarding measures to ensure trustworthiness of the study, an explanation of what many joint sessions with members of the research team aimed to accomplish has been included on page 11 (lines 6-9).

Comment 6, 7 and 10. The rationale for selecting the two traditional healers interviewed in the study has been included in the “Data collection” sub-section; page 9; paragraph 2. Strategies on how to scale-up collaboration between traditional medical practice and mainstream medicine in the region/country and in similar countries affected by the co-epidemic have been discussed on page 25; paragraph 1. The constraints which have to be taken into consideration when scaling-up these practices have also been mentioned.

Comment 9. The issue of patient delay has been removed from the discussion because it was not relevant to the findings.

Comment 11 and 12. The use of “expert patients” as lay counsellors as a finding in this study is mentioned on page 21; lines 18-22. The relevance of HIV support groups to the frontline workers has been included on page 24, lines 5-16.