Reviewer's report

Title: Which health care facilities do adult Malawian antiretroviral therapy patients utilize during intercurrent illness? A cross sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 21 September 2011

Reviewer: Erik J Schouten

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting study that contributes to understanding health seeking behavior of PLWA on antiretroviral treatment. It is of interest for those working in HIV care and treatment in developing countries.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
Yes

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
Yes

3. Are the data sound?
Yes

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Yes

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
In general yes. I have some minor comments.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Yes

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes

Minor Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can be trusted to make)

Page 2 (background) ‘overcrowding and shortages of ART staff’ may affect patients’ choices, but as these overcrowding and shortages of staff are not
further discussed in the paper I suggest using other examples.

Page 3 (second paragraph). One of the reasons often mentioned in relation to access to health services is the distance to the clinic and the related costs (travel and time off work). Did the authors consider this as a possible reason for decision where to seek health care?

Page 4 (second paragraph). The several disadvantages mentioned in the paragraph seem logic, but are merely assumptions. Do the authors have any experiences of sub-optimal treatment outcomes due to the utilization of other than their own clinic? If this is the case, it would strengthen the paper.

Page 6 (health care utilization). There was no significant difference in frequency of reporting illness episodes between males and females (55.3 vs 38.0%; p=0.21). I am not a statistician, but I was surprised that this is not significant. Is there a typing error? Of the whole group 58% reported to have had at least one illness in the past 6 months. It does not seem plausible that both males and females report lower frequencies.

Page 6 (health care utilization). ‘In univariable analysis … longer duration of travel …were associated with …’ does not tally with table 2, where a p-value of 0.094 is given for ‘travel time to clinic’.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.

Erik Schouten