Reviewer’s report

Title: Experiences of care and support among people living with HIV in Viet Nam

Version: 1 Date: 19 December 2011

Reviewer: Daniel Reidpath

Reviewer’s report:

This is a nicely written manuscript that reports data from a survey conducted in 2004 and a series of Focus Group Discussions conducted in 2007. Much of what is reported here is fairly well known, and as it stands it adds little new to the literature, although it does reinforce the findings.

I have two concern with the paper. The first concern relates to its current relevance. The area of HIV related stigma and discrimination can move fairly quickly within countries depending on the kinds of policies that have been adopted, and the variations in those policies that occur over time.

Because the data are now old -- with respect to HIV issues -- it is not clear if the findings remain relevant, and this is the key to whether they warrant publication.

Is this a manuscript of historical interest, or does this manuscript have a bearing on HIV in Vietnam today.

My second concern relates to the focus on self-report data. I accept that PLWHA have described the lack of adequate services and difficulties accessing services. A sense by patients that they are not receiving appropriate care is not necessarily evidence that they are not receiving appropriate care. It would be useful if there was a stronger -- evidence based -- indication that health services were deliberately providing inadequate care. I write "deliberately", because eve if it can be demonstrated that a health services' care was less than ideal, it has to be established that it is less than adequate because of the patients' HIV status. Health services necessarily have to make choices about where to allocate resources. If there is an issue of equity exposed by that choice then something important is revealed. If it is simply the case that health services in general are inadequate for all, that is far less interesting.

Major Compulsory Revisions

First, the authors need to make very clear how findings from 2004 and 2007 are relevant to treatment and care of PLWHA in Vietnam in 2011/2012.

Second the authors need to demonstrate that the "experience of care and support" is not simply an empirical investigation of the perceptions of PLWHA but that those reflections reflect a genuine disadvantage and not just a subjective sense of disadvantage. This moves the paper from one that reports a well known and well established phenomenon to one that demonstrates an important, current issue with the treatment and care of PLWHA.
Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests