Reviewer's report

Title: Too little but not too late: Results of a literature review to improve routine immunization coverage in developing countries

Version: 1 Date: 15 January 2008

Reviewer: Damian Walker

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

This is a well-written paper, regarding an important topic; how can vaccination coverage rates in developing countries be increased? I only have one major concern and that relates to the paper's originality. I need to be convinced that this review is warranted in light of the papers by Pegurri et al. (2005) and Batt et al. (2004)


It is surprising that no mention is made of these reviews until pages 14-15 in the Discussion, where it is inferred that these papers focused exclusively on issues of costs and cost-effectiveness; both papers reviewed the published and grey literature respectively on the effectiveness of strategies to improve immunization coverage (in addition to the literature on the cost and cost-effectiveness). So what is the added-value of this review?

It is noteworthy that this paper and the other two articles have not reviewed exactly the same literature. While references 4, 6-10, 13-15, 20, 22 (report version of this reviewed by Batt et al. 2004) 24-25 and 28 are common between the reviews (and 26 is outside of Pegurri et al.'s time period), that still leaves references 5, 11-12, 16-19, 21, 23 and 27 that were not included in Pegurri et al.'s paper and similarly, there are many articles that this review has not considered as well. The authors should examine why the discrepancy between what appear to be two high quality reviews. Perhaps the 'missing' papers are among the 35 excluded papers. Could the authors include a list of them with their reasons for exclusion?

I would question to what extent the authors have systematically reviewed the gray literature - again, compare and contrast their results with those of Batt et al.
If an intervention is shown to be effective in one setting does that ensure that it will be effective if applied elsewhere, and importantly vice versa?

Would it be possible for the authors to include their search histories? This would ensure full replicability of the review.

The checklist for assessing the quality of the studies should be included. Also, surely some of the assessment elements are more important than others - was this reflected in the scores?

Why did only one reviewer take a look at the observational studies?

Minor Essential Revisions
- GAVI is now the GAVI Alliance (abstract and elsewhere)
- I assume the authors 'identified' rather than 'collected' 9,000 papers ... although I could be wrong (abstract and elsewhere)
- Haemophilus influenzae should be italicised (page 3)
- Do the authors really mean 'disabilities' or rather illness episodes? (page 3)
- Could the authors use more recent data than 2002 (for burden data) and 2005 (for coverage data)? (page 3)
- How is 'developing' defined? (page 3 and elsewhere)
- The section starting "All of the nine grey ... management practices (n=7." should be moved to the Results section
- Are 'non-health workers' community health workers? (page 8)
- Suggest that an increase in coverage from 5% to 58% is impressive: re-phrase as the word 'only' downplays the achievements of the control district (page 9). Same paragraph, did reference 9 have a comparison area? If not, see above point about the quality assessment. Similar point regarding reference 15 (page 10)
- Please re-phrase the sentence as it seems contradictory - surely through increasing demand additional services will be provided: "These strategies increase demand for vaccination without providing additional services" (page 9)
- The terms 'timeliness', 'dropout' and 'missed opportunities' should be defined (page 10)
- How can attendance increase to 102% Was there a problem with the denominator? (page 12)
- Table 2: for reference provided for Nigeria is incorrect

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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