Reviewer’s report

Title: Outputs, cost and efficiency of public sector centres for prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV in Andhra Pradesh, India

Version: 1 Date: 27 August 2007

Reviewer: Isabelle de Zoysa

Reviewer’s report:

General
This paper provides detailed data on the outputs and economic costs of selected public sector centres providing PMTCT services in Andhra Pradesh, one of the states in India most affected by the HIV epidemic.

The authors have conducted an analysis of the efficiency of these services, as measured by the economic cost per post-HIV-test counselled pregnant women and per mother-neonate pair who received nevirapine.

The results of this analysis show that efficiency was inversely related to volume of the services and to HIV prevalence among pregnant women. Variation between PMTCT centres for unit cost per post-HIV-test counselled pregnant women was modest but that per mother-neonate pair receiving nevirapine was high. The authors discuss some of the implications for the delivery of PMTCT services in India.

My comments on the paper are as follows:

1) The assessment of the economic costs of the PMTCT services and the analysis of their basic efficiency appear to have been carefully conducted. As the authors point out, these efficiency data could form the basis of further cost-effectiveness analyses in India, which would be useful to guide policy decisions and allocation of resources for HIV control.

2) The results of the efficiency analysis however are not surprising. It is entirely expected that efficiency would be inversely related to volume of services and HIV prevalence. As such, the originality and import of this paper is limited in my view.

3) The discussion section is a bit short and lacks detail. Comparisons with other studies are not developed (though references are given). The discussion of the significance of the findings for the design and implementation of services in Andhra Pradesh and in India generally is too brief. The statement of authors that "the new approach of combining VCT and PMTCT services seems justified" remains obscure, as this approach is not described in sufficient detail for a more general understanding.

In my view, the authors could heighten the relevance of their work for an international audience in two ways:
1) Providing, even rough and initial, cost-effectiveness data (maybe they are reserving these for another paper, but I am not sure that this is justified).

2) Developing the comparisons with other studies and the discussions of the policy and programme implications of these results for India and elsewhere.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Providing further information along lines 1) or 2) above.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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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: 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.