Reviewer’s report

Title: The symptom experience of people living with HIV/AIDS in the Eastern Cape, South Africa

Version: 1 Date: 18 October 2008

Reviewer: William Holzemer

Reviewer’s report:

Major compulsory revisions: none
Minor/Discretionary revisions:

I enjoyed reading this paper which documents the HIV symptom burden in this area of South Africa among 607 persons living with HIV infection. Overall, the manuscript is well written and clearly presented. My main suggestion has to do with how the author(s) might consider re-visiting the tables. I would consider combining Tables 1, 2, and 4 and presenting the demographic data and then the comparisons on symptom intensity within the same table. It is not clear why some of the demographic variables were entered into the comparison in Table 4 and others were left out. I would also suggest using a more conservative alpha within each table, perhaps at 0.01 to provide some control for the potential of a galloping alpha effect due to conducting so many t/F tests and chi square tests over the same data set. Also, if you collapse demographic data for testing, the manuscript reads much better if you only present the collapsed frequency data. For example, years HIV positive has multiple levels in Table 1 but is reduced to a dichotomous variable in Table 4.

I am not sure what to recommend regarding Table 3. I would probably report in the text the overall mean intensity, SD, range, etc. for the percentages and mean intensity at the item levels and not report all of them with so much detail in a table. I think the reader would see more and remember more if only the top 10 symptoms were included, or at most the top 20. Partially, this depends if the journal wants to include such a long table.

The authors present an excellent discussion of their findings.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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