Reviewer’s report

Title: The variability and predictors of quality in scaled up AIDS care services: an observational study in Brazil.

Version: 2 Date: 24 July 2008

Reviewer: Eddy J Beck

Reviewer’s report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   a) The authors are trying to ascertain the quality of HIV services, which have been scaled up from 33 in 1996 to 540 in 2002. b) They have identified a number of process indicators, which the authors suggest may be used to review the quality of care provided

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   The authors conducted a survey in 2002 based on a self-administered questionnaire of 115 questions and 107 ‘indicators’. The number of questions were reduced from 157 after piloting the original questionnaire. This was followed by assigning a response based on a 3 point scale. Not sure whether this scale is really appropriate for these questions. K-means cluster analysis used but not described or referenced, to group responses into those which can predict ‘service quality’.

   Subsequent analyses, using ANOVA and multivariate analyses, looked at test differences between group arithmetic means and associations were analyzed between institutional characteristics and quality of services provided.

   While all has been explained under the methods section, presentation could be improved and simplified.

3. Are the data sound?
   Good response rates from the managers but the underlying problem is, what criteria did these managers use to answer the primary data, ie the response to the 115 questions? Empirical data available within their organizations or guestimates? The authors themselves acknowledge this themselves in the discussion.

   The results of the final model are believable and are similar to results obtained in other studies.

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?
On the whole yes.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
The authors do acknowledge several of the important limitations of their work. However, while they do state that the work was performed in 2002, they make no reference a) why it has taken so long for them to prepare this paper. b) How things have changed since 2002 – 6 years have elapsed since this survey was done and how has this affected current service provision and the applicability of the conclusions drawn.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes – this was a survey performed in 2002

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Sort of – very longwinded and could be more focussed.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes, but the text can be shortened in places & English could be much improved, which may make the paper easier to read.

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

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