Reviewer's report

Title: HIV Testing and Care in Burkina Faso, Kenya, Malawi and Uganda: Ethics on the Ground

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Reviewer: Ingvild Sandøy

Reviewer's report:

This is a very interesting review of the experiences with provider initiated HIV testing and counselling (PITC) in four African countries. It is well written and should be of great interest to both researchers in this field and policy makers. The authors have covered a lot of literature, and show that there are great variations in the practice and consequences of PITC. This makes the discussion nuanced and informative.

Major Compulsory Revisions

My only major objection to this paper is that it does not mention or discuss the quality of counselling about risk reduction. Under the subheading "Does PITC lead to benefits? Access to treatment and prevention" only access to treatment is discussed. Although access to treatment may prevent further transmission of infection, as long as access to treatment is not universal and the guidelines currently do not recommend early treatment, counselling on behavioural measures that may be taken to reduce HIV transmission is very important. There has been some concern that PITC places less emphasis on counselling of those who test negative (as mentioned from Kenya by Njeru et al 2011), and thus an important opportunity for HIV prevention is missed. This should of great ethical and public health concern, and I miss a discussion of this.

Minor essential revisions

1) There are a number of problems with the fourth sentence in the second paragraph on p. 5. It reads: "Statistics show remarkable increases in the number of testing sites for example the number of testing sites increased in Kenya, from 3 in 2000 to more than 4,000 in 2009[6, 40]; in and Uganda, from 3 in 2002 to more than 1,200 by 2009; as a result, by 2009, the proportion of health facilities offering routine PITC had reached an estimated 73% of facilities in Kenya [40]."
   -The sentence first mentions Kenya, then Uganda, and then comes back to the situation in Kenya, and this is a bit confusing
   -No reference is provided for the estimates from Uganda
   -There should be a space between "sites" and "for"
   - "and" should be deleted from "in and Uganda"
2) The third sentence on p. 9: "pre-pre ART" should probably be "pre-ART"

3) On p 13, the authors write "[cite a WHO Bull study]". I expect they plan to insert a reference here.

Discretionary Revision
1) The authors mention the removal of user-fees for ART in Burkina Faso. It would be interesting to get some information about user-fees in the other three countries too.

2) A discussion of the implications for consent, confidentiality and linkages to care of the testing approaches mentioned in the paragraph with the subheading "Other testing and counseling strategies" on p. 16 would have been interesting.

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