Reviewer's report

Title: How far will we need to go to reach HIV-infected people in rural South Africa?

Version: 1 Date: 28 February 2007

Reviewer: susan reif

Reviewer's report:

General
This article describes an estimation of access to antiretroviral medications among individuals living with HIV/AIDS in rural South Africa. This is clearly an issue critical to the survival of these individuals. The article is timely and seems to make a significant contribution to the literature regarding antiretroviral access. However, there are a number of areas that need to be addressed to improve the quality and comprehensibility of the article. Of primary concern is the organization of this article. Subheadings are needed to assist with the flow of the article. Specific suggestions regarding organization and other issues are included below.

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

1. The background and discussion sections of the abstract are nearly identical to parts of first few paragraphs of the main body of the article. This redundancy seems unnecessary. I suggest summarizing these sections to make the introduction piece of the abstract more succinct.

2. In the summary section the results are a bit vague. The authors say “many PLWHA in rural areas are unlikely to access ART.” It would be helpful to have more specific information here.

3. The last sentence is difficult to follow – suggest revising this for clarity.

Main body of the article:

4. 3rd paragraph – The authors touched on the problem of distance to travel/lack of health care facilities as barriers to ART in paragraph one and then discussed the fact that several organizations have successfully implemented programs to provide ART in rural areas of resource-constrained counties. I believe it would be helpful in paragraph 3 to briefly add a discussion of the situation in South Africa since this country is the setting of the study. This could include the 1st sentence of paragraph 4 and perhaps some information about HIV/AIDS services for individuals in rural areas of South Africa – are there any service infrastructures or are these individuals forced to travel for any care they receive? Is there any research literature documenting the situation of HIV-positive individuals in rural South Africa that could be cited?

5. Paragraph 4: Please add any references used for these methods (for example – a reference regarding “a gravity type model”)

6. Paragraph 4: The authors mention an access-scaling parameter. It would be helpful to have a more detailed explanation of what this is.

7. Paragraph 5: I believe it would be helpful to have more information regarding the number of PWLHA there are in these rural areas. The authors use percentages to describe access so it would be helpful to identify the number of individuals affected (i.e. 22% of what number?).

8. Paragraph 5, last sentence: Consider adding the exact percentages here rather than saying “increase, but not proportionally”.

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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)
Sentence 5: Should this be “have (instead of has) not yet received much attention”

Paragraph 4: This paragraph seems to initiate discussion of the study methods. Suggest adding a heading saying “methods” or something similar here.

Paragraph 5: This paragraph discusses the results of the calculations. Please consider labeling this section “results” or something similar.

Paragraph 6: Appears to start a discussion/conclusion section. Consider adding a heading to this section.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Paragraph 7, 2nd to last sentence. The authors state “resolving the huge disparities between the urban poor and the rural poorer” requires immediate investment…..” This is an interesting way to phrase this. This almost sounds as if the goal is only to bring the rural poor up to the standard of the urban poor, which I’m sure is not what the authors intended to imply here. Do the urban poor receive all the services they need? Perhaps this would be better phrased as something along the lines of “Addressing the critical need for adequate care for PLWHA in rural areas requires immediate investment…..”

Which journal?: Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of importance in its field

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests