Author’s response to reviews

Title: Pre-referral rectal artesunate in severe malaria: an extensively flawed trial

Authors:

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Editors-in-Chief of Trials:

We are submitting the newly revised version of the paper ``Pre-referral rectal artesunate in severe malaria: an extensively flawed trial" by Karim F Hirji and Zulfiqarali G Premji for continued consideration for publication in your journal. (Kindly note the modification in the title.)

We thank the associate editor, Dr. Moher, for his comments on the previous version, and have accordingly revised the paper. These comments deal with two main points, accuracy and tone. They are addressed in the revised version as follows:

1. Accuracy:

1.1: We agree that our linkage of the NNT to the CONSORT Statement needs be better phrased. This has now been done in line with what Dr. Moher noted and the paragraph in question has been rewritten.

1.2: Given an earlier concern expressed by Dr. Moher, we have come to accept that there is room for disagreement as to whether this trial can be characterized as a fundamentally flawed trial or not. Given that it may not be accurate depiction, we have accordingly changed that description in the title of our paper and everywhere else in the text.

1.3: We have carefully reviewed, once again, all the substantive criticisms we make of Gomes et al. We would like to assure you we have not found them lacking in accuracy.

1.4: We have also changed the wording at several places in this version to make it as accurate as we can.

1.5: All these changes appear in red color.

2. Tone:

2.1: We agree that maintenance of a professional tone is necessary in scientific papers.

2.2: This issue was raised in detail in the first round of review by the referees and
the associate editor. We then modified our paper extensively, and removed all references that might be taken to impugn the personal integrity of the authors of Gomes et al. Both referees expressed their overall satisfaction with the numerous modifications we made on this accord.

2.3: The use of the term "fundamentally flawed" may be misunderstood in that way as well. That is another reason why we have deleted it now.

2.4: Dr. Wittes also provided an extremely detailed list of editorial suggestions to modify the tone and language for the first revised version. Kindly note that we implemented all those suggestions.

2.5: As Dr. Moher has expressed concern on this issue once more, we have rechecked our paper with care, and made many other changes to remove words and phrases that may be misinterpreted or reflect an unprofessional tone.

2.6: We appreciate all the comments made in this regard by the reviewers and the associate editor and have shown our complete willingness to abide them.

2.7: We hope you will find our manuscript satisfactory in that respect now.

2.8: The new changes are marked in the text in red color.

Another point that has now been brought up concerns the length of our paper. We have stated all along that our paper is a comprehensive narrative review that gives a detailed explanation of the criticism being made of Gomes et al. As these criticisms are serious, we need to explain them and the reasoning and analysis behind them in detail. In fact, it was the comments given by the referees and the clarification and changes they sought in relation to the initial version of our paper that increased length of our paper. By giving our reasoning in necessary detail, we maintain the level of transparency needed for the reader to fully judge the accuracy of the criticisms made. We feel that the length of our paper reflects the need to maintain accuracy. We would not like undue brevity and lack of sufficient detail to leave room for misunderstanding in a manuscript that is quite critical in nature.

As indicated by their comments to the first revised version, both referees and Dr. Moher had accepted that up to now. This paper has undergone a very long, almost one year, of detailed review in which the length of the manuscript has come to be accepted as an integral part of its nature. We therefore kindly request you to continue accepting our position that this is an essential feature of our paper.

We thank Dr. Moher, the editorial team, and the reviewers for their kind assistance,

Sincerely,

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