Reviewer’s report

Title: Consent and community engagement for school-based health research in Africa: experiences from a cluster randomised impact evaluation on the Kenyan south coast

Version: 1 Date: 27 November 2012

Reviewer: Andrew McRae

Reviewer’s report:

I think some editorial decision-making needs to take place before this manuscript can go forward in the submission process, so I will keep my comments broad. This is an extraordinarily well-written and clear manuscript that provides an important example of the kind of community engagement that may be necessary for large scale cluster-randomized trials (CRTs) to be conducted.

My initial impression, though, it that it is overly long, probably because it attempts to achieve more than one objective. The paper describes the community engagement strategy, and uses qualitative observations to provide examples of challenges. It also uses qualitative observations to illustrate challenges that are more of an operational nature (e.g. the sections on sensitizing teachers and sensitizing and assenting children) as well as observations about consent processes and parents’ or guardians' understanding of research.

The material on parental understanding of research, randomization and consent does somewhat overlap with the paper that this team published in Malaria Research (Ref number 30), and so it may even be preferable to split this into two shorter manuscripts: one focused tightly on the community engagement, consent challenges (although this second issue does overlap with the previously published paper)

If the editors feel that a single publication is more appropriate, my suggestion would be to focus primarily on the key community engagement sections (numbered 1, 2, and 6). This material is both important and likely to be of interest to the journal’s readership.

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:

None