Reviewer's report

Title: Patient- and delivery-system factors related to acceptance of HIV counseling and testing services among TB patients in South Africa: A qualitative study with community health workers and program managers

Version: 1 Date: 21 September 2010

Reviewer: Ione Lewis

Reviewer's report:

Review report

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

Yes they are new – looking at the co-existence of HIV and TB and ways of reducing resistance to HIV testing - but the terms used throughout the article need definition.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

The methods are appropriate but need locating in the research literature by defining approaches used - including the philosophy of qualitative research and grounded theory. The grounded theory approach to data analysis and reporting has not been used to report on the findings which is a methodological inconsistency.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

This is an exploratory study rather than a study using controls. The data collection method is adequately described.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

In grounded theory the themes emerging from the study are reported on rather than structuring the article around each sub-sample. This style of reporting the study findings could be improved.

There is insufficient use of academic references particularly to define terms and compare the study findings.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

Without reference to other research in this area, the discussion does not seem well balanced at this stage. Also the recommendations in the discussion focus on resources being used more efficiently but this would not be sufficient to address one of the major barriers, the lack of ART medication and funding for health
services. Should generic ART drugs be more widely available in South Africa? Is funding sought from the Global Fund? These are challenges in other nations with high levels of HIV infection and I would have been interested to read more about international implications.

The conclusion states that the study has expanded current literature but this has not yet been demonstrated in the write up of the study, although clearly this IS a valuable study.

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

The title is very accurate and specific.

The abstract and the conclusion contain similar sentences and it would be helpful if the conclusion was written slightly differently to avoid a straight repetition.

7. Is the writing acceptable?

The writing is clear and easy to read. Some grammatical corrections are needed as I note below.

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

1. Findings should be displayed in themes as this is described as a grounded theory method rather than reporting on each sub-sample separately. The themes and codes should have overlapped across the categories and the sub-samples are then examined within each theme. In the discussion differences between the sub-samples should be unpacked and discussed. As it is, the sampling is driving the display of findings, not the methodology.

2. The discussion needs to be located in the context of other research on patient preferences – if not in TB and HIV because of insufficient research to review, then more generally looking at the health consumer research. Does this study confirm or disconfirm the findings of previous studies? What does other research say about how to reduce stigma of being HIV+ (something not yet addressed in the article).

3. The data displayed in Table 1 was not linked to discussion of the findings so it doesn’t seem useful to have collected it. How did gender influence practice and whether practitioners were lay or managers? All data gathered should be used in the analysis or it’s not useful to include.

- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Background:

1st paragraph: ‘few TB patients’ – ‘recent estimates suggest that only 46% …’: it would be more accurate to say ‘less than half’ or ‘a minority’ instead of ‘few’. 4th paragraph 2nd last sentence: remove ‘in’ before Rachier et al. (2004).
2. Terms used in the article need definitions from the literature. This is an area of weakness throughout the article. Research literature should be used to reference your methodology – eg definitions needed for the terms stigma, qualitative, focus group, semi-structured interviews, peri-urban and peri-rural, key informants, validity, content analysis, grounded theory, coding.

3. Group discussions and individual interviews:
   1st paragraph 1st sentence: commence with ‘The’ or ‘An’.
   The 1st paragraph should commence with the sentence: ‘Both open- and closed-ended questions …’ as this is a more logical structure for the paragraph.

4. Data analysis:
   1st paragraph: Explain what you mean by ‘semi-quantified’ and why this approach was used.

5. Findings:
   Use of indents to display quotes from participants means you don’t also need to use inverted commas. Delete commas.
   Method refers to themes being semi-quantified this is not displayed in the findings section.

6. Community health worker exploration:
   Paragraph commencing ‘The second most prominent theme’ is expressed poorly – eg remove ‘with respect to’.

7. Paragraph commencing ‘similar to the views of’. 2nd sentence remove a, b & c so sentence reads more smoothly and remove ‘that’ so it is a complete sentence.

8. Program manager exploration:
   Paragraph commencing: ‘The second most …’ needs ‘the’ in front of ‘lack’.

9. Discussion:
   Paragraph 2:
   Needs some corrections:
   1st sentence ‘qualitative work’ should be ‘qualitative study’.
   3rd sentence ‘Both respondents groups’ should be ‘both groups of respondents’ …
   ‘lack of trust of maintaining confidentiality’ should be ‘lack of trust in staff maintaining confidentiality’

   Paragraph 3:
   Final sentence replace ‘impact’ with ‘improve’.
   The 2nd last sentence in the 4th paragraph is difficult to understand. ‘Model person’? Do you mean ideal model for practice? Needs to be clarified. Remove
a) and b) from this sentence. This sentence is also found in the abstract.

10. Limitations (final paragraph in discussion) should include patients not being included in the data collection, especially the views of people living with HIV and AIDS which is quite a strong policy focus in most countries due to the stigma described as a barrier to testing in this article. We have professionals’ views about patient preferences – and we know from other studies these can be incorrect.

- Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

11. I wonder why patients themselves were not asked about barriers to testing for HIV – did you consider sampling patients with TB? Would be good to put in a rationale for not interviewing.

12. Background 3rd paragraph last sentence commencing ‘Such information is especially important …’ needs rewriting into 2 separate sentences as it is too long. 4th paragraph add ‘to’ in front of ‘improve’. Avoid the use of ‘improve’ twice in the one sentence – use ‘to enhance patient health’ for example instead.

13. Method:
Use tables to display the selected health care delivery facilities by type and for sample of health care workers.

14. Participants:
Use of written consent: are there any literacy issues which affect use of written consent? Eg the lay counselors.

15. Program managers: you allude to power here (through the use of the term hierarchy) – this could be more openly acknowledged.

16. Discussion of findings: I started to wonder how the symptoms of being physically ill with TB might remove motivation for HIV testing eg tiredness etc, as I didn’t see this mentioned by health workers you might like to add the illness process of TB to your discussion of results.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare I have no competing interests.