Reviewer’s report

Title: What determines health-related quality of life among people living with HIV? An updated review of the literature and practical recommendations.

Version: 1 Date: 24 April 2014

Reviewer: Jessika Deblonde

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to review this interesting and timely paper with the well-defined objective of providing an overview of determinants influencing HRQoL.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. The introduction should make reference to the variety of existing HRQoL instruments.

2. There is a discrepancy between what you describe in the methods and the first paragraph of the discussion. The methodology refers to all the steps of a systematic literature review (databases, keywords, inclusion and exclusion criteria) whereas the discussion refers to this study as being a non-systematic review. Can you explain which (type of) papers you did not document in this review? In order to allow a contextualization of the findings of your review, you should then describe – at the start of the results section – the article selection process, along with some other features of the selected papers (number of papers, type of study, country, …).

3. In contrast to the results section, which is very detailed, the discussion is (too) concise and rather poorly elaborated. Taking into consideration the title of your manuscript which refers to ‘practical recommendations’, I would expect a more detailed elaboration of the proposed categories of interventions/recommendations, including the link with figure 1.

4. There is a need to better explain how to translate the findings from this review into recommendations because the way is not straightforward. For example:

• p.6: “Physical health improves more in patients in whom HAART was started at lower CD4 count because the physical health at baseline is worse.” Notwithstanding, clinical studies have indicated that maximum benefit in terms of reduced morbidity and mortality is obtained when HIV infection is diagnosed and treated early. Based on this, the WHO consolidated guidelines on the use of antiretroviral drugs for treating and preventing HIV infection (2013) promote expanded eligibility for ART with a CD4 threshold for treatment initiation of 500 cells/mm3 or less.

• P.6: “A lower mental health over time can arise in cases where longitudinal follow up resulted in successful control of HIV.” So, this means that … ?
• p.7: “PLWHA with a GB virus C infection reported even a better quality of life than PLWHA without GB virus C infection.” So, this means that … ?

• p.9: “No alcohol use was a predictor for a lower physical health.” So, this means that … ?

• p.9: “Disclosure was found to have negative effects on physical and mental health”. So, this means that … ?

Minor essential revisions:
1. In the title, you mention ‘practical recommendations’ whilst in the discussion you give examples of ‘interventions’. These words have a different meaning and you should consequently use the right word.

2. P.5, §3, line 3-5: this sentence is not very clear. You probably mean that lower education represents poorer ability to understand therapy recommendation.

3. p. 6, line 4: typo, I assume that you mean CD4 >200 cells (instead of CD4<200 cells)

4. p.6 in ‘Stadium and time since diagnosis’, line 5-7: I don’t understand what you want to say.

5. p.7, line 2: typo: through

6. p. 8 in ‘Coping, locus of control, religion’: Internal HLOC and others HLOC would merit some words of explanation.

7. p.8 in ‘Social support’, line 5: typo: through

8. p.8 in ‘Social support’: tangible social support would merit some words of explanation.

9. p.9 in ‘Health care, disclosure and stigma’: disclosure was found to have negative effects on physical and mental health. Can you please add the reference(s)?

10. p.9 in ‘Health care, disclosure and stigma’, the last 2 sentences: What do you mean by the ‘obligation’ to disclose? I don’t understand the last sentence: PLWHA should be encouraged to what?

11. P.9 in ‘Alcohol use’, line 4: you should better explain the statement that light to moderate alcohol use could indicate the ability to engage into riskier behaviour.

12. p.10 in ‘Adherence’: what do you mean by ‘reporting concerns’?

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