Reviewer’s report

Title: Better care for babies: The added value of a modified reverse syphilis testing algorithm for the treatment of congenital syphilis in a Maternity Hospital in Central African Republic

Version: 0 Date: 05 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Ian Simms

Reviewer's report:

Many thanks for giving me the opportunity to review this very interesting manuscript. I have made a variety of suggestions which I hope you find useful as you revise your manuscript.

1 I found the title 'The added value of a ...' a bit misleading as I rather assumed that this initiative was part of an overall control strategy that included early and late pregnancy screening to prevent MTCT. However, on reading further I found that this wasn't the case. Perhaps you could state clearly at the start of the background the conditions under which the novel strategy would be most effective.

2 Abstract; there are a few minor mistakes in written English such as 'delivering women' and 'congested maternities' which need to be corrected. The rest of the document should also be checked by a native English speaker.

3 Page 4 line 32. What is the role of paired sera in diagnosis, or would this not be possible within the context of this population?

4 Was PCR testing available?

5 Line 45.' Neonatal risk depends on … maternal history' - do you have any information on the risk of syphilis infection in the mother, such as sex work and could this be included in the tables? Was there any information available on the mothers medical history, such as pregnancy outcomes, miscarriages, live births, etc.

6 Methods Page 6, line 25. outcomes for the neonate. Significant clinical outcomes relating to congenital syphilis may not been seen for a number of years - was this time delay taken into account in the analysis and are there plans to follow the patients up over time? (2-6 years)

7 Page 7 line 43. How was the information on patient history obtained - was it from the patient or from medical records?

8 Page 7 line 57. A chancre could be confused with a herpetic lesion - please could you say how this differential diagnosis was eliminated.

9 Page 16. Was the inappropriate treatment partly due to allergies reported by the patient?
10. Page 17 line 35-41. In a middle income country early and late pregnancy screening would be affordable which would completely change the effectiveness of congenital syphilis prevention and control.

11. Page 17 line. Could you provide more detail concerning the urban setting specifically why this carried an increase risk of syphilis infection, please?

I have attached a copy of the latest WHO estimates concerning congenital syphilis and maternal infection.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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