Reviewer's report

Title: The ethics of talking about ‘HIV cure’

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Reviewer: Kenneth D Miller

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Discretionary Revisions

Review of “The ethics of talking about HIV Cure”

This is a very good article on an excellent topic. Understanding, defining, and then using the word cure is complex for physicians, scientist, and patients just as the authors describe. The examples that are given at the beginning of the article are useful and then flow into the broader concepts that you discuss. You then present excellent material on a variety of pertinent and related topics including; a historical perspective of cure, sterilizing vs. functional cure, interventions as a cure vs. a state of being cured, a biomedical and biopsychosocial model, cured vs healed, cure rates, and “curative hope”.

With this in mind, on my first read of the paper I found some of the wording and phrasing difficult to understand though on a second reading the meaning became clearer. The concepts that are presented are excellent but some passages required several readings and I would encourage the authors to reword some of these sentences to improve readability. I share below several examples where the content of the sentence is important but it require more than one reading. I would encourage you to reword sentences that are too complex and to consider adding some more subheadings that allow the reader to identify the important points that you identify on the list of topics above including, a historical perspective of cure, sterilizing vs. functional cure, interventions as a cure vs. a state of being cured, a biomedical and biopsychosocial model, cured vs healed, cure rates, and “curative hope”.

I share with you a few examples where the reading took away from the meaning or where I had questions.

Page 2: Line 31-33

“We argue that attention to language ethically matters in this context, and identify some advantages as well as potential pitfalls of how different HIV/AIDS stakeholders may make use of the concept of cure.- This sentence seems to blend several different ideas including the language and the concept of cure

Page 3: Line 21
“(albeit still incurable)”—The idea that HIV is curable is the topic of the paper so I would recommend leaving this qualifier out.

Page 5: line 20-22

“If these are the final goals of HIV cure research, understanding of sterilizing and functional cure- and the constellation of related topics—should be as clear and unproblematic as possible”- the dashes and comments within the sentence make it difficult to understand

Page 5: line 27-31

“(2) cure as understood in contemporary HIV cure literature belongs firmly in what is called the biomedical model, and given the criticisms aimed at that model in understanding disease (including HIV), the advantages and pitfalls of conceptualizing HIV cure biomedically need to be critically evaluated”- This is a complex sentence and what criticisms are you referring to?


“Many cancer clinicians still shy away from using the C word—The C word sometimes refers to cancer and not cure

Page 10: Line 27: Please remind the reader what PLWHA stands for.

Having some additional subheadings would be helpful

Page 5: line 5

A bolded subheading might be “What does cure mean? Sterilizing and Functional Cures”

Page 6: Line 30

A subheading might read, “The difference between an intervention as a cure and being cured”

Page 9: Line 10

A subheading might be: “A modern conceptualization of cure”

In summary: I recommend this important paper for publication. I would encourage the authors to review and improve the readability as they determine to be appropriate.

Kenneth Miller, M.D.
Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest 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: No conflicts noted