Reviewer's report

Title: The ethics of talking about 'HIV cure'

Version: 2 Date: 19 November 2014

Reviewer: Sana Loue

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The authors state (p. 8 lines 17-18): "the biological cure is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for healing." Some authors in the social sciences and in theology suggest that healing can occur in the absence of a physical cure. "Normality" is a laden term that also has different meanings in different disciplines. This sentence needs to be unpacked further or revised.

2. Even assuming that HIV could be eliminated so that there is no detectable virus, what does cure mean if there are resulting sequelae of the infection? As an example in another context, certain parasitic infections may be eliminated but, if they persist for too long without treatment, they may lead to chronic sequelae that remain even after the parasitic infection has been treated and eliminated. Similarly, if HIV infection leads to neuropsychological deficits, however minute, what does cure mean if these deficits persist in the absence of detectable viral load, etc. In such a situation, even if there is psychological healing and functional cure, can we really speak of a cure?

Minor essential revisions:

3. There are several grammatical errors in the manuscript that require correction.

Discretionary Revisions

4. In some cases, HIV infection has contributed to individual's positive identity. In alluding to a possible shift of identity from that of a PLWHA after a cure, the authors emphasize the potential positive effects (p. 12). However, some individuals have effectuated positive changes in their lives as a result of their HIV infection and their assumption of a new identity related to their HIV status. It would be helpful if the authors explored more fully the potential consequences of a cure for individuals in this situation.

5. Page 15: The authors indicate in suggesting potential lines of research that HIV cure language may "chip away at the stigma associated with the virus." However, it may also increase the stigma for those individuals who are unable to achieve a cure of their HIV. This consequence has been seen in the context of cancer, with various "experts" proclaiming that good things happen to good people, that illness results from negative actions/thinking, etc.

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.