Reviewer’s report

Title: Ethical challenges for international collaborative research partnerships in the context of Zika in the Dominican Republic: a qualitative case study

Version: 0 Date: 11 Apr 2017

Reviewer: Raffaella Ravinetto

Reviewer’s report:

This is a well written paper, that timely addresses an important topic in international medical research. The attention for some ethically important aspects such as capacity building and community engagement are especially important. Some recommendations may be formulated for improvement of the paper:

- In the Methodology, it should be explained how the sample size was determined. At lines 142-145, it is not clear if the contact with the key-informants was preceded by a contact with/agreement by their institution (please clarify). Concerning lines 147-8, please briefly clarify if information on "health research, policy, education and practice and from local to international funding agencies" was collected based on formal search (or otherwise, briefly describe how the documents were selected).

- In the Ethics Section, please add a statement about protection of participants' confidentiality. It would also be useful to explain if/at what stage the recorded information was coded or anonymized.

- It may be worthwhile to remind, either in the Introduction or in the Discussion (or both) that the Zika epidemics was preceded by the Ebola outbreak in West Africa; and to shortly elaborate on whether the lessons learned in the Ebola epidemics have/have not informed the management of the Zika epidemics, in particular concerning research's planning, priorities settings, governance. To date, the Ebola outbreak is only briefly mentioned at lines 88-89.

- The recommendation at lines 455-6 (that ECs should revise collaborative agreements, to ensure that they are fair) is very interesting and may deserve some more elaboration: would ECs need some more specific training, to get familiar with critical elements such as benefit-sharing in international research? Should this be done at national level or regional level (to ensure a common approach and understanding but the different ECs)? …. In addition, given the identified weaknesses concerning community engagement, the Authors could consider recommending that ECs would also look into "community engagement" aspects when revising protocols.

- Lines 439-45: these findings may lead to further reflection on other critical aspects, for instance unbalance in authorships, and also on ethical issues related to data sharing and biobanking: if data and/or samples repository will be located in third countries instead of the outbreak countries, there is a clear risk of disempowering the local research community. Even if these
aspects were not covered at the time of the survey, the authors could consider planning further analysis/research, e.g. within the working group mentioned in the Conclusions.

- The focus of the paper is on the Dominican Republic, but it could be useful to discuss whether public health-oriented research agendas for outbreaks could also be discussed and agreed at regional level.

- Pratt and Hyder published in 2016 a target article in the Am J of Bioethics (Governance of transnational global health research consortia and health equity. AJOB 16(10): 29-45), which focuses on global health research partnerships and in particular on how their governance should be structured to advance health equity. It was followed by a number of replies (Pratt & Hyder. Response to Open Peer commentaries on "Governance of Transnational Global Health Research Consortia and Health Equity", AJOB 2017 17:1, W4-W6). It is suggested that this set of papers may be considered to support some aspects of the Discussion.

Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article of importance in its field

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

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?
If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal