Reviewer’s report

Title: A systematic score-card based approach to site assessment in preparation for Lassa fever vaccine clinical trials in affected countries

Version: 0 Date: 11 Sep 2019

Reviewer: Alex Mitchell

Reviewer's report:

I would like to thank the editors for giving me the opportunity to review this manuscript. I think the paper is based on an interesting idea, but needs to be rewritten slightly and present additional information before being considered for publication.

Major revisions

The main thing this paper needs is some tables. The authors have received responses from 35 sites, and therefore must have a wealth of data, which it would be a shame not to report. I think the authors should produce a table that summarises the results for each question, for all 35 responses and also by country. This table would be very long and would probably go in supplementary material. In addition, the authors should choose the questions from the survey which they think are the most important in terms of being able to run a vaccine trial (for example, I imagine if a site doesn't have any fridges then they wouldn't be able to take part in a trial), and should produce a table summarising the results for these questions, which would then go in the main body of the paper.

The first 4 paragraphs of the Discussion section seem like they would be more appropriate in the Introduction section. The Discussion should be a small section focussing on interpretation of the results, and highlighting the key messages of the paper.

I disagree with the last paragraph of the abstract, which states that it is feasible to hold Lassa fever vaccine trials in affected countries. You haven't yet validated your score-card, so you can't be sure that a high score actually means that a site will be successful.

I think you should mention as one of your limitations that you don't know whether your score card successfully predicts whether a site will be successful. Perhaps this could be an idea for a future study?

Minor revisions

Line 84: 'coalition for epidemic preparedness innovation' should be capitalised.

Line 98: 'good clinical practice' should be capitalised

Lines 109 to 111: Please list all clinical trial sites surveyed.

Lines 119 to 120: Just to clarify, is this 3 sites from each country or 3 sites altogether?
Line 132: Was it one author or multiple authors who allocated the scores? Perhaps put the initials of the author in brackets?

Lines 143 to 144: How did you decide on these cut-offs? What were they based on?

Line 151: It's better to place the percentage immediately after 35.

When stating numbers, such as on line 153, where appropriate you should also give a percentage. So for line 153 you put 40.0%, as this is the percentage of received surveys that were placed in category A.

Line 163: After 20, also report the standard deviation of the number of scientific staff

Line 166: Instead of &gt;90% put the actual percentage

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