Reviewer’s report

Title: Impact of community engagement and social support on the outcomes of HIV-related meningitis clinical trials in a resource-limited setting

Version: 0 Date: 18 Jun 2020

Reviewer: Richard Grant

Reviewer's report:

This paper demonstrates the importance of public involvement [PPI] in research and in particular engaging with the community and social support of patients with HIV. These principles readily transfer to patients who have different health conditions.

DATA.

I appreciate the views expressed by the author and understand the commitment and dedication to this approach. However I do feel that the conclusions laid out in the paper would be more acceptable for a wider readership if they were supported by more data. There will be researchers and practitioners who will be looking for robust data to support the conclusions and any consequent change in their practice. The paper does acknowledge the lack of data [lines224 & 225] but you need to show credible evidence on how you arrived at your results. For example, line 36 ... 31% of what? in 2010 and 1% of what? in 2017 ... are these two comparable? There is no evidence that the two populations are of similar or different size.

A few other examples:
line 127 Refusal rate of 31% - of how many?
line 159 how many out of a total missed the scheduled clinic visits?
lines 167 - 169 How many viewers of the movie were there? How was the response to the movie assessed?
line177 - how many care givers?
To be successful it is important to demonstrate evidence based research and robust data.

PPI
What was the nature of the PPI input at the design stage of this research? How many people were involved and how? You conclude that community engagement and social support should be included [line61] .. What did you do? Was your PPI at this stage sufficient, how could it have been improved? What would you do in the future.
In line 79 you say '.it is never too late to involve ...' .. would it not be better to say ... 'it is never too early to involve ..' ?

CLARITY

Lines 141, 142. I think a rethink of how this is worded would make the conclusion more clear .. even better if supported by data. [numbers of patients - total / those referred per month].
Lines 236, 237. Think again about the message here ... Do the words you have used 'get the message over clearly', to an outsider? Is there a better way to get this message over?

**MOVIE**
I viewed the movie. It was a powerful and dramatic movie ... with a clear a direct message. It would have been good to get some idea of the feedback from its intended audience [see above] I obviously viewed it from a totally different background and was struck by how powerful and emotional it was.

I would encourage the author to review / edit their paper to ensure that it will be robust enough to achieve publication and thus reach the intended audience. A paper which speaks with authority from an evidence base will more likely influence practitioners to reconsider their practices and instigate changes. There is an obvious commitment to their work and approach which deserves wider dissemination.

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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

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