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: Meerat Kaur

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for writing on your interesting work to engage people to improve their understanding and participation in your trial. You provide some useful pointers for others who may want to do the same. I do however, feel some revisions would strengthen the paper.

Overall, I wonder whether you need to reframe the paper, and more clearly state the issue of recruitment and retention in trials, and that this paper explores how community engagement can help. I feel at the moment this paper is still trying to present the trial as the key focus, when that is another paper. This comes across in places such as your methods, which focus on the trial and not the approach you have taken to engagement.

Introduction: The statements being made in the intro need referencing (e.g. majority of clinical trials are conducted in infectious disease - this needs referencing). At the moment the introduction is under-referenced. This would mean you explore the challenges to community engagement in the conclusion, which I feel would substantially strengthen the paper. You have mentioned some of these (e.g. people's ability to connect and engage because of finances or lack of phone etc).

Methods: need to expand how you engaged with the communities - these are the methods you are writing this paper about so this needs to be clear. The trial should not be the focus, but rather the part that the reason you engaged communities. So how many people did you engage, who were these (define the various categories), where were they located, how did you decide who to engage etc.

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