Reviewer's report

Title: Searching for chronic hepatitis B patients in a low prevalence area - role of racial origin.

Version: 1 Date: 21 December 2003

Reviewer: Martin Prieto

Reviewer's report:

General

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. In table 3 the proportion of HBsAg+ subjects among western relatives is wrong. The right figure is 27.2% not 9.9%.

2. In table 4 the heading of the third column is incorrect. It should read anti-HBs+ plus anti-HBc+. The current column name is misleading.

3. In the Abstract section, where it reads "There was greater occurrence of HBsAg and anti-HBs among asian relatives" it should read "There was greater occurrence of HBsAg and anti-HBc asian relatives".

4. The term anti-HBc is misspelled throughout the text as anti-HBct.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. Data in Table 1 should be placed in the methods section as they refer to the baseline characteristics of the patients and their relatives. Also this table should be split in two, one with the patients' demographic data and another with the relatives' data. In the patients' baseline data, important data are lacking and need to be provided, including the distribution of histological diagnosis, ALT values (mean ± SD), presence or not of HCC, HBeAg/HBeAb status and HBV DNA status. Regarding the relatives' baseline data, the authors should provide the ALT values.

2. In table 2, authors do not provide data about the proportion of relatives who were anti-HBs+ alone and those who were both anti-HBc- and anti-HBs-. These proportions should be included in the table together with the other data.

3. The authors should provide the readers with a comparison between HBsAg+ asian relatives and western relatives regarding age, sex, ALT values, HBeAg/HBeAb status, HBV DNA levels.

4. In the methods sections, the authors should specify if any of the relatives had been vaccinated against hepatitis B before the study. In addition, relatives responding to the HBV vaccine with
production of anti-HBs should be excluded from further analysis.

5. The results in the abstract section should be better structured and accompanied with the appropriate p values.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

None