Reviewer's report

Title: Role of Life Events in the Presence of Colon Polyps among African Americans

Version: 1 Date: 27 February 2013

Reviewer: Preet Paul Singh

Reviewer's report:

Ashktorab and colleagues have tried to answer an interesting question, by comparing life event scores in the preceding 12 months in patients who were found to have polyps vs not among a clinic based cohort of 110 patients undergoing complete colonoscopy for screening as well as diagnostic purposes.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The comparison of the two groups (polyps vs no polyps) and whether they were similar, is not provided. Table 1 should have this information for both groups to rule out confounding.
2. The patient numbers are small and only restricted to African Americans which limits power and generalizability.
3. Although the authors conclude that patients who experienced more stressful life events may be at increased risk of colon polyps and adenomas, this is based on a higher total ‘life event score’ in patients with polyps (Table 2). Interestingly this includes both negative (bad, stressful) and positive (good, not stressful) scores and as they are individually not different in two groups, the conclusion seems premature. As the proposed question is “stressful life events”, only using the negative score may be more appropriate.
4. The instrument used – the 82 item life event questionnaire (LEQ) – was developed for adult female respondents of childbearing age and has mostly been used in teenage mothers or young adults/parents. Although comprehensive, it appears to be inappropriate to evaluate psychosocial stress in African American subjects with a mean age of nearly 60 years.
5. Results Section – “Predictors of life event score” – Line 1 - Polyp diagnosis should not be affecting the life event score as it was measured before the colonoscopy. It should be the other way round.
6. Details about the regression model are lacking. Also, to answer the study question, regression model should include life event score as a variable alongwith other factors (age, gender, education, smoking status etc) that can affect polyp incidence. But instead, the authors are reporting predictors of life event score – which fails to answer the proposed question. This data is not very useful.
7. Discussion – para 2 – The authors state that as positive events may effect colon polyps. As there was no difference in the positive score in the 2 groups –
this is incorrect. Also it’s incorrect to equate perceived positive life events to “general stress”.

8. Also there is evidence that recall of life events is subject to telescoping (i.e., remote events are reported to have occurred more recently) and to mood (patients with lower mental health scores report more life events, especially perceived rather than factual events). Information about Baseline/known psychiatric diagnosis and its distribution among patients with polyps and no polyps would be helpful.

- Minor Essential Revisions

1. The introduction is quite long and there is repetition in discussion. Some of this can be consolidated.

2. Few grammatical mistakes in para 3 of discussion need correction.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.