Reviewer's report

Title: Risk factors for hepatitis C virus infection among blood donors in southern Brazil: a case-control study

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Reviewer: Dr Gilles Delage

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept after discretionary revisions

This is a well-written paper describing the results of a case-control study on the risk factors of acquiring hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection in Brazilian blood donors. The results confirm previously published data on the same topic. This suggests that the epidemiology of HCV infections in Brazil is similar to that observed in North America.

Discretionary revisions:

1. Selection of controls: the authors should give more details on the procedures used to choose their matched controls. The report as it stands does not permit the reader to determine if any bias was introduced by the method used for selecting controls.

2. Apparently, cases were defined as blood donors having twice tested positive for HCV by EIA. Were both EIAs done using different manufacturers' kits? Was there any validation of their algorithm, comparing it to a "gold standard" (i.e. EIA followed by RIBA or PCR or both)? The authors should comment.

3. In their strategy of grouping risk factors according to hierarchical categories, they did not group incarceration with social and sexual behavior. Placing incarceration in that group would appear appropriate since intravenous drug use and tattooing are confounding factors for incarceration. The authors should justify their choice or reanalyse after including incarceration in the third group of risk factors.

Competing interests:

None declared.