Reviewer's report

Title: Synergic Effect of Chronic Hepatitis C Infection and Beta Thalassemia Major with Marked Hepatic Iron Overload on Liver Fibrosis: A Retrospective Cross-Sectional Study

Version: 2 Date: 18 June 2004

Reviewer: Caterina Borgna-Pignatti

Reviewer's report:

General The subject of HCV infection in thalassemia and the roles of the virus and of iron deposition is of interest. The study includes a relatively large group of patients with HCV infection with and without thalassemia. Unfortunately, the time of infection for the non-thalassemic patients is unknown while for the thalassemic patients it probably coincident with the first few transfusional events. Therefore, while the comparison between thalassemics with and without HCV is appropriate, it is difficult to compare the progression of fibrosis in the HCV non thalassemia patients.

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

In Methods, it is not clear whether the collection of data was performed between April 2001 and jan 2004 or if the data collected referred to liver biopsies performed in that period of time. Also, were the 20 patients assigned to each group chosen randomly among all the patients with the diagnoses of interest? Why were not all the patients with the diagnoses of interest included in the study? To which aspect of the choice of the patients does "randomly" refers? Was the pathologist blind to the diagnosis? The conclusions should mention the importance of treatment of interferon therapy for CHI, especially in thalassemia patients.

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

In Results, second line, the AA say that the study supports the synergic effects of CHI and BMT. Actually, iron deposition and not BMT per se should be responsible for the fibrosis. Angelucci should be spelled with only one L. The Authors abuse of semicolon (;) using it inappropriately to separate words. At the end of discussion: the stage of fibrosis should have been higher (not more) etc.. However, again, the duration of the infection is unknown in the CHI patients.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

First sentence BTM is common in PEOPLE OF etc

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No
Declaration of competing interests:

None