Author's response to reviews

Title: Epidemiologic study of chronic hepatitis B virus infection in male volunteer blood donors in Karachi, Pakistan

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Colleagues

We are grateful for valuable comments from both Dr. Keith Sabin and Dr. Ajay Duseja. We have tried to revise the article in the light of their comments.

Reviewer: Dr. Keith Sabin

General

Unfortunately, we don’t baseline data on the prevalence of anti-Hbc (+) in the general population. However, I wish to state that as Dr. Sabin & others have indicated, IgG anti-HBc generally remains detectable for lifetime\(^1\) but they are not protective & do not neutralize the virus.\(^2\) Therefore, HBsAg (-) controls, & perhaps positive for anti-HBc in our study might have had the potential to become case on subsequent exposure to HBV. However, anti-HBs can neutralize the HBV and provide protection against HBV re-infection (page 54 of Ref 1 in footnote). Therefore, we should have tested our controls for anti-HBs to rule out those controls that did not have the potential to become case. We have included this aspect as a limitation of this study.

Comments:
Pages 3,4,6,7:
- Necessary corrections have been made. No matching of controls with cases on age was attempted

Page 9:
- Necessary recommendation has been included.
- Citation # 29 is from Indonesia and required modification in the statement has been made.

\(^1\) Previsani N, Lavanchy D, Zukerman AJ: \textit{Hepatitis B}. In: Viral Hepatitis: Molecular Biology, diagnosis, Epidemiology and Control. Edited by Mushahwar IK. Amsterdam: Elsevier; 2004: 31-97. (see page 52 & 54 please)

\(^2\) Custer B et al. Global Epidemiology. J Clin Gastroenterol 2004: 38: S158-S168) (see Table 1 on page S159 please)
- Further study has been recommended to look at these variations more closely by collecting data that are more detailed and using appropriate time series analysis.
- Query about unregistered practitioners has been answered.

Page 10

- Citation 34 has been substituted with very recent citation (Janjua et al., 2005) suggesting unchanged situation over a decade.
- The words ‘un-necessary injections’ have substituted with ‘injections overuse’ – the term repeatedly used in the literature from our part of the world.

Page 11

- 2nd para has been deleted as advised
- Last para: Indicated limitation has been included and correction about recall bias has been made.

Page 12

- Ist comment has already been taken care of.
- Cohort study has been recommended as advised.

Reviewer: Dr. Ajay Duseja

As noted above, on the advice of this reviewer and that of Dr. Sabin, a limitation to this effect – i.e. for economic reason our inability to do multiple tests including one for HBV DNA to more accurately assess the prevalence of HBsAg has been included in the revised manuscript. (see limitations of the study)

Thank you for your time and considerations.

Yours sincerely,

-sd-
Saeed Akhtar, PhD