Reviewer's report

Title: Serum hyaluronate as a Non-invasive Marker of Hepatic Fibrosis and Inflammation in HBeAg-negative Chronic Hepatitis B

Version: 4  Date: 19 July 2005

Reviewer: Edoardo Giovanni Giannini

Reviewer's report:

General

The manuscript was greatly improved. I appreciated the thoughtful review of the paper made by the Authors. However, there are still some points that need to be addressed.

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

1. The Authors state that they aimed at evaluating the usefulness of HA for discrimination of "levels of fibrosis". On the basis of the typology of patients studied and of the obtained results, I would suggest that the aim should be "to evaluate the presence of extensive fibrosis in patients with chronic hepatitis B".
2. Methods. The Authors should report in the text that their pathologist was unable to differentiate fibrosis stage 5 and 6.
3. I would be glad to see a scattergram of the HA serum levels plotted against fibrosis scores.
4. Discussion, page 9, second paragraph (HA cut-offs): The Authors should add that the cut-off value for a given variable depends upon the sample in which it has been identified. In order to be reproducible, a cut-off value should be obtained in a sample representative of the population with the disease.
5. Discussion, page 9, third paragraph (HA predictive values): Fifty-four out of 65 patients had extensive fibrosis, and 54 out of 65 had "extensive" inflammation. What was the relationship between these two histological features in this cohort?
6. Discussion, page 10, last paragraph: On the basis of their results, the Authors can conclude that HA was correlated with stage and predictive for the presence of extensive fibrosis but not "predictive for the level of fibrosis".

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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. Abstract, Conclusions, first line: I would suggest "Serum hyaluronate was the best predictor of the presence of extensive fibrosis..." rather than "...of the presence of liver fibrosis...".
2. Background, first line: HBV should be spelled out the first time it is cited in the text.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests