Reviewer's report

Title: Genetic variability in the precore and core promoter regions of hepatitis B virus strains in Karachi

Version: 2 Date: 6 April 2006

Reviewer: Helene Norder

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper describes to my knowledge the first describing genotypes, precore promoter mutants and precore stop mutations of HBV strains from in Pakistan. 109 strains were analysed by the commercially available INNO-LiPA line probe assays.

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

The selection criteria of the patients should be given, and is needed for the evaluation of the results.

The patients should be subdivided into four groups in table 1 before comparing the laboratory data, as liver enzymes and clinical cirrhosis. The first subdivision should be as is done between HBeAg positive and negative patients. The next subdivision should within each group be between patients infected with strains with or without pre-core and/or core promoter mutations, i.e. HBeAg positive patients with and without mutations, and HBe negative patients with and without mutations.

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
The number of anti-HBe positive patients should be given.

The 448 base pair fragment obtained by PCR should be sequenced for the strains infecting the two patients, who may have a double infection with strains of genotype A and D. The INNO- Lipa analysis may have given incorrect typing and should be confirmed by sequencing.

The authors should describe the results with the in-house PCR.

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