Reviewer’s report

Title: Imbalance of tissue inhibitors of metalloproteinases (TIMP) - 1 and - 4 serum levels, in patients with inflammatory bowel disease

Version: 2 Date: 10 June 2008

Reviewer: andrew S Day

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Specific comments:
1. The Results section of the Abstract now includes details of TIMP-2 data. Whilst I agree it is important to mention TIMP-2 in the results, it may be sufficient to comment that TIMP-2 levels did not differ between groups (and to remove the detail of the actual numbers).

2. The ratio between TIMP-1 and TIMP-4 may have relevance to our understanding of the roles of these proteins: the relationship to disease activity (such as it is) should not alter this.

3. The fact that the TIMP-4 positively correlates with two markers of inflammation, yet is less in patients with IBD than in controls has not yet been explained adequately.

4. Furthermore the relationship between these proteins and a disease activity index needs to be considered carefully: it is clear that activity indices, which contain various clinical and historical aspects, do not always indicate the amount of mucosal (and systemic) inflammation.

5. The Abstract and the final conclusion of the Discussion section mention that TIMP-1 levels can be used as indicators of disease activity. Given that there was a numerical difference of only approximately 33 ng/ml between the mean TIMP-1 level in active and that in the inactive group, I am not convinced that this would be useful in clinical practice.

6. The Background section refers on page 4 to plasma levels of TIMP-1, whereas it is stated on the next page that serum levels of TIMPs have not been evaluated. This is conflicting, given that these measurements both refer to circulating levels of the protein (as contrasted to mucosal levels).

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'