Reviewer’s report

Title: Non-detection of Chlamydia species in carotid atheroma using generic primers by nested PCR in a population with a high prevalence of Chlamydia pneumoniae antibody

Authors:
Grace M Ong (grace.ong@bll.n-i.nhs.uk)
Peter V Coyle (peter.coyle@bll.n-i.nhs.uk)
Aires AB Barros D’Sa (Aires.barrosd?sa@royalhospitals.n-i.nhs.uk)
W Glenn McCluggage (Glenn.mccluggage@bll.n-i.nhs.uk)
W Paul McCluggage (p.duprex@qub.ac.uk)
Hugh J O'Neill (hugh.oneill@bll.n-i.nhs.uk)
Dorothy E Wyatt (dorothy.wyatt@bll.n-i.nhs.uk)
Kathleen B Bamford (k.bamford@ic.ac.uk)
Barney O'Loughlin (b.oloughlin@qub.ac.uk)
Conall McCaughey (conall.mccaughey@bll.n-i.nhs.uk)

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Reviewer: Dr Lisa Jackson

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept after revision, which I do not need to see

This paper reports the results of testing of 44 endarterectomy specimens by PCR to detect C. pneumoniae. The organism was not detected in any of the specimens tested. C. pneumoniae was also not detected in white blood cells from the 40 patients.

As the authors indicate, it is important, but often relatively difficult, to publish the results of negative studies. The authors appropriately explore possible explanations for their findings and discuss them in the context of the published literature. Their interpretations are also in general appropriate.

Comments

1. Background. The references cited in support of the statements in the first paragraph represent only a very small fraction of all of the relevant publications in the area. In particular, it would be worthwhile to indicate that although some seroepidemiologic studies have found positive associations many others have not.

2. Specimen processing. Most of the other studies evaluating detection of C. pneumoniae in WBCs have used mononuclear cell fractions. The methods should clarify the types of cells that were tested in this study and the authors may wish to comment on how differences in the testing methods may have contributed to variation in the results compared with other studies.

3. Results, histology. It doesn’t appear that the reports of the macroscopic findings add much to the histologic results.

4. Discussion. The meaning of the first sentence is not clear. What estimate would the confidence intervals apply to? It may be more accurate to say that with a relatively small number of specimens the
null finding could be due to chance.
5. Page 14, paragraph 2. The last sentence appears to assume that there is a causal association of C. pneumoniae and atherosclerosis but this association has not been proven.

**Competing interests:**

None declared.