Reviewer’s report

Title: Duration of viral shedding in hospitalized patients infected with pandemic H1N1

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Reviewer: Edward Goldstein

Reviewer’s report:

Referee report on “Duration of viral shedding in hospitalized patients infected with pandemic H1N1”.

The paper under review contributes to the body of knowledge about the association between symptom presentation, viral shedding and the role of antivirals in influenza patients. The results of the paper are well-documented; the referee’s questions are primarily on the emphasis put in the presentation:

1. As the authors report in the Abstract, “The mean values of viral RNA concentration along the observation period were not significantly different in ILI and SARI patients. However, patients with SARI showed a significantly longer time of viral shedding as compared to patients with ILI”. This point is elaborated upon in the Results section and Figure 2B - viral shedding is defined as time through which viral loads are detectable by PCR; starting days 6-7 since symptom onset, when viral levels are low in both groups, viral levels in the ILI group become particularly low for accurate PCR detection. Thus duration of shedding is to a large extent the artifact of the accuracy of a PCR test, and some reference to that should be made in the Abstract.

2. As Figure 2C suggests, SARI patients with pneumonia had different patterns of viral shedding compared to SARI patients without pneumonia, with the latter exhibiting viral shedding patterns similar to patients with ILI (Figure 2A), at least in terms of the sharp drop between days 4-5 and 6-7 in viral load and PCR detectability (Figure 2D). Is the dichotomy for SARI vs. ILI justified in reporting the differences in viral shedding? Perhaps pneumonia vs. non pneumonia cases is a more representative description.

3. Can any comparison be made between viral shedding of non-hospitalized patients (Figure 1) and different categories of hospitalized patients?

4. Did all SARI patients with pneumonia had pneumonia upon admission to the hospital? Was there any relation between progression to pneumonia and antivirals?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.