Reviewer’s report

Title: Peginterferon alpha based therapy for chronic hepatitis B focusing on HBsAg clearance or seroconversion: a meta-analysis of controlled clinical trials

Version: 2 Date: 29 April 2011

Reviewer: James Guevara

Reviewer’s report:

The manuscript entitled “Peginterferon alpha based therapy for chronic hepatitis B focusing on HBsAg clearance or seroconversion: a meta-analysis of controlled clinical trials” is a revised systematic review and meta-analysis of controlled trials evaluating pegylated interferon alpha for the treatment of chronic hepatitis B. The results of 14 eligible trials suggests that this therapy was more effective than lamivudine or conventional interferon alpha in HBsAg clearance and seroconversion. In this revision, the authors have satisfactorily addressed reviewer concerns raised in the first submission. A few minor revisions are still necessary.

Major Revisions

None

Minor Revisions

1. To assess for the potential for publication bias, a common problem in meta-analysis, the authors undertook funnel plots of all relevant outcomes. The funnel plots with the exception of figure 7 were fairly symmetrical, but these can be difficult to determine visually with few studies. I don’t think figure 9 was asymmetrical. I would recommend that they drop all funnel plots except figure 7, add a title to figure 7, and discuss it rather than figure 9 as potentially demonstrating publication bias. They will also need to add to the methods section that they used funnel plots to assess for publication bias.

2. The authors conducted a sensitivity analysis for the first outcome combination therapy vs. monotherapy with Peg by examining the outcome only among high quality studies. They should also conduct this sensitivity analysis for all the remaining outcomes and then add to the methods section information on how they conducted sensitivity analyses of quality.

3. Table 1 is in reality a figure. They should relabel it as Figure 1 and then subsequently relabel the remaining tables and figures accordingly.

4. The authors did not state what they did with events with “zero” cells. They should state whether they added a “0.5” value to these cells so that the computer program could correctly compute an odds ratio for those studies.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.