Author's response to reviews

Title: Prevalence and Cumulative Incidence of Abnormal Cervical Cytology among HIV-infected Thai Women: A 5.5-Year Retrospective Cohort Study

Authors:

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Version: 3 Date: 26 November 2010

Author's response to reviews: see over
MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS:
BACKGROUND: Paragraph 2, sentence 4
A point previously raised. Please see original comments.
I suggest the authors either remove “because of an insensitive test” or add “this may either reflect an incident lesion or reflect a prevalent lesion missed on PAP smear.”
Paragraph 4, bracketed area
A typographical error – you’ve repeated low grade squamous intra-epithelial lesion; the second one should read High Grade squamous intra-epithelial lesion.

Response:

Paragraph 2, sentence 4
Delete: because of an insensitive test
Add: this may either reflect an incident lesion or reflect a prevalent lesion missed on Pap smear.

Paragraph 4, bracketed area
Change low grade to high grade

DISCUSSION: Paragraph 2, sentence 6 and CONCLUSION:

As stated in the original comments on this paper, the findings of this paper do not support 6 monthly PAP smears for 3.5 years. See previous detailed comments. The fact that Thailand does not have a National screening programme in place would add weight to this as valuable screening resources will be utilized for a debatable benefit. Advise again that these research findings be reported without informing screening intervals as the data does not support the recommendations. Alternatively, please motivate, in the light of all comments submitted, why you think these claims are valid. Further advise revising the title in the light of statement above.

Response:

Discussion: Paragraph 2, sentence 6
Delete: Semi-annual Pap smears for at least 3.5 year periods of time should be considered, especially for those women with a baseline CD4 count less than 350 cells/µL. If the results are all normal within this particular period of time, these women should then undergo annual cytologic screening.

In every place that the aforementioned sentences were deleted, we replace them with the following sentence “Our population might need more than two normal semi-annual Pap smear before shifting to annual cytologic screening.”

Conclusion:

Delete: semi-annual Pap smear for at least 3.5 year periods of time

The conclusion was changed to There are high prevalence and cumulative incidence of ASCUS+ in HIV-infected Thai women. With a high lost-to-follow-up rate, an appropriate interval of Pap smear screening cannot be concluded from the present study. Nevertheless, the HIV-infected Thai women may require more than two normal semi-annual Pap smears before shifting to routinely annual cytologic screening.

Title:

Change: An Appropriate Interval of Pap Smear Screening Protocol for HIV-Infected Women: A 5.5-Year Retrospective Cohort Study

To: Prevalence and Cumulative Incidence of Abnormal Cervical Cytology among HIV-infected Thai Women: A 5.5-Year Retrospective Cohort Study

Reviewer’s report

Title: An Appropriate Interval of Pap Smear Screening Protocol for HIV-Infected Women: A 5.5-Year Retrospective Cohort Study

Version: 2 Date: 3 November 2010
Reviewer: Cynthia Firnhaber

Reviewer’s report:
The article is improved-- However rewriting of several sentences still needs to be done before publishing

Response:
A considerable number of sentences were reworded as suggestion
Associate Editor's comments:

Several key issues remain.
1) The authors still have not adequately addressed the actual follow-up experience of this cohort. It seems there were high rates of loss to follow up, and the median follow up time per participant and median number of pap smears and the mean interval between smears should be presented more clearly.
2) Reviewer 2 has several additional comments that should be addressed. The authors need not return them to the reviewer.
3) I would suggest the authors de-emphasize the impact of repeat screening, as it appears there were very few participants who had complete 6 monthly screening, per their protocol.
4) the regression analysis should also bear in mind that the results in part reflect retention in the program, and that their outcomes are subject to potential biases, such as survivorship bias / retention in care.

Response:

1)  - Title, Discussion (Paragraph 2, sentence 4) and Conclusion were changed as suggestions of reviewer: Tanvier Omar

   - The median follow up time per participant and median number of pap smears were already presented in the Results, Paragraph 4, Sentence 3 and 4.

   - The interval between smears was 6 months for all patients. It’s already presented in Methods (Paragraph 1, sentence 2). Although there were a few patients that came a few weeks later than the appointment, the mean interval between consecutive smears remained the same.

3) We deleted every sentence regarding this issue and replace it with the following sentence “Our population might require more than two normal semi-annual Pap smear before shifting to annual cytologic screening.”

4) We discussed more regarding this issue in the limitation section