Author’s response to reviews

Title: Hepatitis B and C infection in haemodialysis patients in Libya: Prevalence, Incidence and Risk Factors

Authors:

Wiam A Alashek (laxwa1@nottingham.ac.uk)
Christopher W McIntyre (Chris.Mcintyre@nottingham.ac.uk)
Maarten W Taal (Maarten.Taal@derbyhospitals.nhs.uk)

Version: 2 Date: 3 September 2012

Author’s response to reviews:

Response to Reviewers Comments: Hepatitis B and C infection in haemodialysis patients in Libya: Prevalence, Incidence and Risk Factors

We thank the reviewers for their helpful comments and offer the following specific responses:

Reviewer: Valentina Svicher

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The authors used HBsAg positivity as marker of HBV infection. However, the use of this marker does not allow to include patients with occult HBV infection, that is defined by the presence of HBV DNA in the liver in the absence of HBsAg.

In the absence of a highly sensitive assay for serum HBV DNA detection, HbcAb positivity is so far considered as a surrogate marker for occult HBV infection (please, see Taormina Statements 2010). At this regard, a recent paper led in Egypt was aimed at investigating the prevalence of occult HBV infection in hemodialysis patients. The authors detected HBV DNA in 6 of the 145 patients (4.1%) and HbcAb in 29/145 patients (20%) (Abu El Makarem et al., Hep Mo 2012). Thus, the authors should also provide results regarding the prevalence of HbcAb positive patients.

Response: We agree that these are important considerations. Unfortunately, however, HBV DNA detection and HbcAb assayes were not available for this study. We have added some discussion regarding this limitation of the study in the discussion section of the paper.

Discretionary Revisions

2. Did the authors check for HDV infection?

Response: There were unfortunately no data available regarding HDV infection.

3. It has been shown that only 50 to 60% of patients with endstage renal disease achieve protective antibody levels following immunization against HBV (Fabrizi et al., 2003; Sali et al., 2008). On these bases, how many patients in this study
were vaccinated against HBV, and were some vaccinated individuals infected by HBV during haemodyalisis?
Response: 1216 of 1520 patients included in the study received hepatitis B vaccine but unfortunately post vaccination antibody levels were not measured. One of the patients who had been vaccinated subsequently seroconverted to become HBsAg positive. These data have been added to the results.

4. If possible, the authors could also provide the following information:
   - viral load in serum: Viral load was unfortunately not measured.
   - level of transaminases: Serum transaminases are reported in Tables 1 and 2
   - viral genotype: Viral genotype studies were unfortunately not performed

Reviewer: Massimo Ciccozzi

I only suggest to reduce the number of table indicating the main important one and put the others as supplementary material i.e. tab 1 and tab 3 can be as Table S1 and S3 or described in the text and deleted as table.

Response: Tables 1 and 3 have been removed from the main paper and converted to supplementary tables as suggested.