Reviewer's report

Title: The high comorbidity burden of the Hepatitis C Virus infected population in the United States

Version: 1 Date: 20 October 2011

Reviewer: Scott Holmberg

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In general, the reviewer is in favor of any analysis that expands our understanding of the extra-hepatic manifestations of HCV. This manuscript modestly advances our understanding. There are unacknowledged biases that need to be addressed. For example, people with two or more ICD-9 code notations for HCV have had to be seen by a medical facility twice or more in a brief period, so not surprising that they are likely to have a lot of co-morbidities (bias of ascertainment) and to be een for HCV antiviral therapy (please see comment 2., below)

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. 1st Para under “Co-morbidities associated with HCV disease (page 12) or 2nd para under “…not known to be associated with HCV disease (page 13)”. Many of the co-morbidities known or not known to be associated with HCV infection or treatment—such as back pain/problems (32.5%), joint disorders (29.3%), URIs, diarrhea etc-- are also very frequent in the non-HCV-infected population. So the major revision is to show, preferably in a Table, a comparison of selected conditions of interest among HCV and HCV-uninfected pop (with “N” of the uninfected pop).

- Minor Essential Revisions

2. Under limitations paragraph (last long para before “Conclusions”), the authors do a very good job talking about limitations of clinical coding data. They also need to address the bias of ascertainment (of sick patients and of patients taking antiviral meds) because of the way HCV-infected patients were selected (at least two medical facility notations of HCV).

3. Page 7, “enrolees” mis-spelled (should be enrollees)

- Discretionary Revisions

4. “Box 1” and “Appendix A” can be put separately in electronic appendix

Please note that both the comments entered here and answers to the questions below constitute the report, bearing your name, that will be forwarded to the authors and published on the site if the article is accepted.
Based on your assessment of the validity of the manuscript, what do you advise should be the next step?

- X Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest
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- An article of limited interest

Quality of written English
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- Acceptable

Statistical review
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- No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests
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'I declare that I have no competing interests'