Reviewer's report

Title: Serum cortisol predicts death and critical disease independently of CRB-65 score in community-acquired pneumonia: a prospective observational cohort study

Version: 2 Date: 26 January 2012

Reviewer: Beat Muller

Reviewer's report:

Major points

1. Is cortisol as good as urea or is a CCRB-65 superior to CURB-65 score? If it is equal then urea would be preferable as it is more readily available and can also be used in patients treated with steroids/adrenal insufficiency (where cortisol as prognostic factor is misleading). If not measurable (why not?), the likely practical inferiority to urea must be mentioned.

2. It is unclear if the patients were tested for a possible adrenal insufficiency, which could have affected the cortisol levels.

3. It is unclear when exactly the phlebotomy was performed. The term “time of inclusion into the study” is ambiguous.

4. The study was approved by the ethical board of the University of Magdeburg but no one of the authors appears to have a relation to this university.

Minor points

1. The definition of “critical pneumonia” is given 2 times: “Background” section, the last paragraph and “Material and Methods” section, in the “Outcome parameter” paragraph.

2. The seventh paragraph of the “Discussion” section should be placed in the “Introduction” section.

3. The figures are labeled as “2 a-d” in the eighth paragraph of the “result” section, but the labels on the figures are “2”, “3”, “4”, “5”.

4. The exact p-values should be used in the Table 2 instead of “NS”.

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