Reviewer's report

Title: Bacterial vaginosis and vaginal flora patterns in patients presenting with vaginal discharge syndrome in The Gambia, West Africa

Version: 1 Date: 15 November 2004

Reviewer: Catherine Ison

Reviewer's report:

General

This manuscript describes the prevalence and patterns of BV-associated flora among women in The Gambia, West Africa. It is a very ambitious study, particularly the microbiological analysis of the flora. The manuscript is very clear and detailed, and is generally easy to follow.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. A semi-quantitative analysis of the flora has been undertaken by dividing growth into confluent, semi-confluent and scanty. While this is a perfectly valid approach, it is not clear what extra information this gives as the data as it is presented for all women. This type of data is not often available and it would be valuable to divide the analysis into those with or without BV.

2. Nugent’s gives three categories including an intermediate category, which is not recognised by Amsel’s. It would be useful for the authors to comment on this difference and to describe the microflora of intermediate, which can be seen in figure 1 but is not directly referred to. There is very little discussion about this intermediate category.

3. The lack of association between the diagnosis of BV by Nugent’s and Amsel's (figure 1) is very surprising. While it would not be expected to get a total correlation, almost 30% of patients that are Amsel's negative having a Nugent’s score of 7-10 is very unexpected. What do the authors think are the reasons for this? Was there any quality control checks on reading of pH or detection of a fishy odour?

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

4. Identification of strict anaerobes was performed using Gram staining and susceptibility to a range of antibiotics. It would be useful for others if this could be referenced or details giving for the identification.

5. Mycoplasma culture should be referenced.

6. The high percentage of clue cells in wet preparations compared to that in the Gram stains is also
unexpected and would in part explain the poor correlation between Nugent’s and Amsel’s diagnosis of BV. Do the authors have any opinions on this discrepancy?

7. In the discussion, group B streptococci are described as highly pathogenic. This can be true but they are also associated with vaginal flora in normal women. It is probably more accurate to say ‘can be highly pathogenic’.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.