Reviewer's report

Title: Prevalence of Human Papillomavirus cervical infection in an Italian asymptomatic population

Version: 1 Date: 6 August 2004

Reviewer: John Sellors

Reviewer's report:

General

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

The authors do not refer to key articles on HPV prevalence surveys and thus miss the evidence on what age-specific prevalences and risk factors (after controlling for age) have been found worldwide.

The statistical methods are described in one sentence but they are key to the understanding of the data - more explanation of the approach to logistic regression analysis should be given. Crude and adjusted (for age and other factors) risks of HPV infection should be given for each variable. Age-specific prevalences should be given in Table or Figure, showing the prevalence for (1) any HPV infection and (2) by any oncogenic type. Given their data - it is not clear on what basis the investigators choose to use a cutoff of 30 yrs of age for their logistic regression analysis.

There is some question about the prevalence of SIL or LSIL in the sample - 3/503 (0.6%) is relatively small, in contrast to what is stated in the text (SIL) Table 1 mentions instead that this is the number of women with LSIL.

The Discussion seems to be mostly unrelated to the data that the investigators' data - more effort should be made to first analyze data by age and then compare to what others have found. For example, it is known that there may be a 'second peak' in HPV prevalence around the age of 50 yrs but the investigators' approach to analysis would to have allowed them to see this, let alone discuss it. On what basis do the authors conclude from their data that HPV testing would or would not be useful to introduce?

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

In Discussion, 1st sentence, 'nuns' may be a morely generally understood term than 'sisters'. Some assessment of the ability to generalize findings from this sample of women to general population would be worthwhile - even use of the education level as a proxy for socioeconomic status in Italy or the region would be helpful to the reader.

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: Yes

Declaration of competing interests: none