Reviewer's report

Title: A simple and rapid approach for screening of SARS-coronavirus genotypes: an evaluation study

Version: 1 Date: 30 June 2005

Reviewer: Leo L Poon

Reviewer's report:

General

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

Chung et al presented a paper which describes the use of TaqMan allelic discrimination real-time PCR assays for genotyping of SARS-CoV. Using 5 different SNP markers that identified from other epidemiological studies, the authors correctly genotyped all the studied samples. In particular, Chung et al identified 7 of their isolates that might link to a previously reported SARS case. Their findings were well presented and it demonstrated the use of this technology for epidemiological investigation.

Major comments:

1. The SNP used in their studies were entirely based on the data generated from the SARS outbreak in 2003. Considering the virus might re-emerge from the animal reservoir, the assays established in this study might not be useful marker for the possible outbreaks in future. The authors might wish to highlight this point in the article. Nonetheless, they findings clearly demonstrated the feasibility of using this approach for epidemiological study once useful SNPs have been identified.

2. The authors might want to state the type of samples (i.e. original clinical samples or isolates) used in their assays in Table 2.

3. The author might want to delete the term cost effective in their introduction.

4. The TaqMan allelic discrimination real-time PCR technique has been used for the genotyping of other viruses (e.g. varicella-zoster virus, hepatitis C virus, bovine viral diarrhea viruses and HIV). The author might wish to delete references 17-19 and cite those publications which are more relevant to their virological study.

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

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

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