Reviewer’s report

Title: Paediatric Investigators Collaborative Network on Infections in Canada (PICNIC) Study of Aseptic Meningitis

Version: 1 Date: 26 December 2005

Reviewer: Marvin Harper

Reviewer’s report:

General:
This is a straightforward study with a couple of basic aims. To describe the epidemiology of aseptic meningitis in Canada including the seasonality and etiologies. Secondly there is an attempt to describe disease by classification into subcategories and the use imaging.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
Is it meningitis without pleocytosis? It is interesting that one third of infants with EV had no pleocytosis. But what does it mean? I am not even certain why the test would have been sent. I tend to agree with the authors that the problem is likely in the definition of what is normal CSF for the infant. It might be worthwhile to apply a single standard of >7 wbc (or 8) across all age groups.

The very low rate of sequelae is interesting but was any systematic follow-up testing done? If not, this should be listed as a limitation.

It is quite surprising that such a high proportion of children had diagnostic imaging of the head and even more surprising that 27% were abnormal. The precise nature of these abnormalities were unclear to me. It would be more useful to report the proportion with an abnormality of the CNS thought to be somehow related to the infection (excluding pre-existing abnormalities or sinusitis). Table 1 is not that useful and the overall presentation of this data could be incorporated into the text and likely improve clarity.

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

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'