Author's response to reviews

Title: Hepatitis B Vaccinations Among Koreans: Results from 2005 Korea National Cancer Screening Survey

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We revised the manuscript based on the comments from the reviewer, James Fung.

1. “The authors have concluded that vaccination in this population is important for secondary HCC prevention, reduce liver cancer incidence, and mortality. In Asia (as in Korea) where hepatitis B is endemic, chronicity occurs with vertical/early horizontal transmission - and not acquisition of HBV in adulthood. Nearly all adults who acquire HBV in adulthood will clear the virus (as they are no longer immunotolerant). The risk of significant flare with acute hepatitis B and fulminant hepatitis is far greater in adults than the risk of HCC. The mean age of the subjects is over 50 years old. In unprotected 50 year olds, the risk of HBV infection (apart from healthcare workers/promiscuous individuals etc) is likely to be low. The chances of developing HCC from acquiring hepatitis B infection at the age of 50 is likely to be extremely low. The majority of hepatitis B-related HCC develop after the age of 50 in people who have had almost lifelong chronic hepatitis B infection. Therefore can the authors comment on these important aspects of HBV-related HCC, the risk of acquiring chronic hepatitis B infection in this age group, and the subsequent risk of HCC of these patients in their discussion before concluding that vaccination in this population will decrease HCC.”

We agree with reviewer’s comments and revise our conclusion (See page 15, last paragraph).

It is recommended that Korean adults start liver cancer screening at age 40. However, the Korean public in general lacks knowledge about the need for and benefits of liver cancer screening (e.g., ultrasonography, serum α-fetoprotein). Implementation of the recommendations made based on the results of this study can focus on primary liver cancer prevention as well as secondary liver cancer prevention. First, providing treatment and follow-up for HBV infected individuals is very important for primary prevention. Next, identifying Korean adults who are unprotected through screening tests and encouraging them to have a series of vaccination is another aspect of secondary prevention. These two important liver prevention strategies will reduce liver cancer incidence and mortality among this population.