Reviewer's report

Title: Outcome of Tuberculosis (TB) in a low incidence area: a 4-year study in Geneva, Switzerland

Version: 1 Date: 28 April 2009

Reviewer: Robert Colebunders

Reviewer's report:

This is a retrospective cohort study in an outpatient clinic of the Geneva University Hospital describing clinical and sociodemographic characteristics of TB patients, analysing treatment outcome and identifying risk factors associated with treatment failure or relapse. The main findings are that the majority of their TB population are young foreign-born immigrants, that the rate of HIV-coinfection is higher than previously reported in studies from Switzerland and that cure rates are good.

Some comments:

Methods

Why do you use intrathoracic (IT) and extrathoracic (ET) TB instead of the more commonly used pulmonary and extrapulmonary TB? Further in the text these terms are used concurrently, possibly confusing the reader as no definitions were given of IT and ET.

Treatment outcome paragraph: Definitions of cure rate and success rate are mixed up. I would stick to the internationally recognised WHO-definitions of cure (smear conversion of S+ cases) and success rate (cure and completion at end TB treatment).

WHO aims: achieving at least an 85% cure rate and 70% detection of patients with sputum smear-positive pulmonary TB (WHO/CDS/TB/2003.313)

Discussing treatment outcome, it may be worth mentioning explicitly of what consists TB treatment at your setting: drugs, duration, frequency?

How was the treatment delay calculated? How was the time of the onset of symptoms retrieved from a retrospective database (patient recalling first symptoms or first presentation at health care facility)?

Results

Clinical presentation: confusing. Leave out calculation of 183-30, 99-30... The figures in the table 2 and the text differ. Ex: PTB 158 (text 152), 29% adenitis (text: half had TB adenitis)... 

Be careful expressing “OR” as probabilities, which is only correct when dealing with a small sample size!

Cave with interpretation/generalisation of results: wide confidence intervals due
to low sample size. Maybe worth noting in ‘limitations of study’ section?

Fourth paragraph of page 8: confusing as no correspondence of numbers neither with table 2 nor with fig 3. Could you clarify?

Same page: BA and BAL used for first time without explanation of abbreviation.

Outcome: 42 cases incomplete (p10) – 42 cases unsuccessful (table4): is this coincidence or error?

Discussion

Structure of sentence under 1/ and 3/ needs reviewing.

Be careful not to mix up cure rate-success rate (see previous comment).

Several references are missing in second paragraph p11. The order of the references also does not seem to be logic to me. Reference list: nr 32 is incomplete.

Tables

Table 1: use subheadings to structure table better

Table 2: review figures; consistency of terms (PTB – IT TB); structure PTB and EPTB; are the smear results in the table results from sputum examinations only or a combination of sputum and bronchoscopy results?

As for the English: followed at our institution, co-infected with HIV, to be on antiretroviral treatment, low-incidence country...

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests