Reviewer’s report

Title: MRCP compared to diagnostic ERCP for the diagnosis of biliary obstruction: a systematic review

Version: 1 Date: 18 May 2006

Reviewer: C. Mel Wilcox

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)

Your extensive review compares MRCP to ERCP for “biliary obstruction”. I have questions and suggestions for your manuscript.

1. The title suggests evaluation for “diagnosis” of biliary obstruction. Do you mean that obstruction is present or actual cause of biliary obstruction?

2. I had previously read your extensive review (reference # 3). What is the overlap between that manuscript and this paper as they seem quite similar?

3. You comment on page 5 that you excluded studies comparing MRCP with diagnostic ERCP. I am not sure what “diagnostic” ERCP relates to. Are these studies where an injection was performed, a stone was seen, and no endoscopic therapy performed? I recognize the difficulty in comparison studies where criteria were broad and study design perhaps insufficient. I am though concerned that as you stage on page 7 “in only one study did all selected patients have both MCRP and diagnostic ERCP. Thus, is your extensive review really comparing poorly done studies and therefore your ultimate results provide us little guidance?”

4. Page 12. Another potential issue regarding comparison of MRCP is, of course, which study is done first and timing. We all recognize that small stones may pass spontaneously from the bile duct and therefore an MRCP may be positive while ERCP is subsequently negative.

5. There is always concern about sensitivity based on stone size. Could you glean anything from your review regarding accuracy of ERCP based on stone size?

6. It would be important to determine how the diagnosis of biliary malignancy was made in your studies. We recognize that biliary brushings may lack sensitivity and therefore long term follow-up is important.

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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?: 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: No

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