Author's response to reviews

Title: A Population-based study of dementia in the oldest old: the Monzino 80-plus Study Design, methodological challenges, and population characteristics

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Version: 3 Date: 16 May 2011

Author's response to reviews: see over
To the attention of the
Editor-in-Chief
BMC Neurology

Re: MS: 946823484732506
A Population-based study of dementia in the oldest old: the Monzino 80-plus
Study design, methodological challenges, and population characteristics

Milano, May 16, 2011

Dear EDITOR,

We have revised our manuscript following all the minor revisions suggested by the reviewer and hope that in the present form it is now acceptable for publication in BMC Neurology.

All changes made when revising the manuscript have been highlighted in yellow. We took advantage of the revision to further improve the quality of the English language. All changes are colored in blue. Below you will find the point-by-point response to the reviewers’ comments.

Thank you for your kind attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ugo Lucca

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Point-by-point reply

Reviewer's report

Title: A Population-based study of dementia in the oldest old: the Monzino 80-plus Study Design, methodological challenges, and population characteristics

Version: 2 Date: 25 April 2011

Reviewer: Ananya Roy

Reviewer's report:

Minor essential Revision:

1. Figure 1: Please label the study municipalities on the map and significance of shades of grey (if any, otherwise they can just be homogeneously grey).

   The meaning of the shades of gray was reported in the legend of Figure 1A (the location of the province of Varese in Italy and in Europe), 1B (the location of the province of Varese in the Lombardy region) and 1C (the study area of the Monzino 80-plus Study): “Figure 1 The study area of the Monzino 80-plus Study: A. Europe and Italy (in grey); B. The Lombardy region and the province of Varese (darker grey); C. The province of Varese and, in darker grey, the area of the eight municipalities initially investigated”. To make the reading of the Figure more immediate, in the revised manuscript we have added some colors and reported the name of the municipalities in the legend:

   “Figure 1 Map of the study area of the Monzino 80-plus Study: A. Europe, Italy (in grey) and, within the borders of the Lombardy region, the province of Varese (in black). B. The study area: the province of Varese (in grey) and the area of the eight municipalities initially investigated: in red Gallarate and in orange the seven municipalities of the lower Olona valley (Fagnano Olona, Gorla Maggiore, Solbiate Olona, Gorla Minore, Olgiate Olona, Marnate, and Castellanza)”

2. Figure 2: Even though General practitioners might have been interviewed, they are not study population. Figure 2 should only show the flow of study population. GPs were not only interviewed but, in a parallel study, they were asked to fill in a form on the medical history of their patients. The “297” are not GPs, but, as reported in the first paragraph of the Results, the elderly individuals for whom information was available in anonymous form from their GPs. Following the reviewer’s request, in the revised manuscript we have made the content of this box on the flow chart more explicit:

   “Individuals for whom information was available from their general practitioners: 297”

3. Language:

   Abstract:

   "The Monzino 80-plus Study is a prospective door-to-door population-based survey among all eighty years or older residents in several municipalities in the province of Varese". Please consider replacing several municipalities with the exact number of...
municipalities.
The need to be concise in the abstract urged us to deliberately choose an indefinite quantifier ("several") to synthesize what was analytically reported under "Methods-Study design" ["All registered individuals of 80 years or older residing in Castellanza, Gorla Maggiore, Gorla Minore, Marnate, Olgiate Olona, and Solbiate Olona and of 85 years or older residing in Fagnano Olona on the prevalence day (February 12, 2002) were eligible for the study. In order to increase the number of very old and consequently the confidence in the distributions, the survey was subsequently extended to all registered elderly of 90 years or older residing in Gallarate on January 1, 2005 and, recently, to all the elderly 100 or older and residing in the remaining municipalities of the province of Varese in 2009 (n = 272). In consideration of the small number of men in the age class 95-99, the study was further broadened to include a random sample (n = 110) of men aged 95-99, residents in the same municipalities of the centenarians in the first semester of 2010."] which is not possible to summarize in one number.
In light of this consideration, to follow the reviewer’s suggestion we have rephrased the sentence in a more general way:

“The Monzino 80-plus Study is a prospective door-to-door population-based survey among 80 years or older residents in the municipalities in the province of Varese, Italy.”

Main text:

Methods: "Economic condition of the population is satisfactory".
This is subjective assessment by the authors and should either be deleted or backed up by statistical evidence.

What we wrote ("Some 114,000 people reside (2009) in this predominantly urban area, which is traditionally industrial (textile and mechanical industry), though in the past, at the time the present study cohort was of working age, also rural. Economic condition of the population is satisfactory and at present employment is mainly in the industrial and service sectors."), is a very general outline of the socio-economic conditions of the present population of Varese province. The estimate of the “economic condition of the population” as “satisfactory” is not at all based on our “subjective assessment” but on basic economic indicators published yearly by national agencies in Italy as well as in many other countries. The mean income of the province of Varese is one of the highest in Italy and, in 2008, ranked 11th among the mean incomes of the 119 Italian provinces (see, for example, Candidi AM and Parente G. Il Sole 24 Ore, February 22, 2010).
In any case, following the reviewer’s request, we have deleted the statement.

"Lists of residents were obtained from the registry offices of the municipalities."
For the readers, could you please clarify if this was birth and death registry or electoral registry?

By definition, a registry office is a State office where birth, deaths and marriages are officially recorded and where civil marriages are performed. Following the reviewer’s suggestion in the revised manuscript we have added the requested specification:

“Lists of residents were obtained from the municipal registry offices where births and deaths are officially recorded.”
Discretionary Revisions:

1. It would be useful if the authors describe if they have archived blood samples for future studies e.g. for genetic risk factors.

   Following the reviewer’s suggestion we have added a sentence under “Laboratory methods”:

   “All blood donors consented to the storage of a blood sample for studies of genetic epidemiology.”