Reviewer's report

Title: Randomised controlled trial of gabapentin in Complex Regional Pain Syndrome type 1

Version: 1 Date: 19 May 2004

Reviewer: Wouter W.A. WWA Zuurmond

Reviewer's report:

General
The present study evaluates the effects of gabapentine for treatment of pain in CRPS patients in a randomized crossover double blind design. Although the study addresses a scientifically relevant question, a number of issues need to be addressed by the authors.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The rationale for this study is only briefly discussed. It seems as if gabapentin is used just because it is possible to do so. More information should be provided with respect to the reasons for applying gabapentin, for instance the incidence of neuropathic pain in patients suffering from chronic CRPS I.

The authors have chosen a cross over design in a clearly chronic group of pain patients. However, a cross over design is most relevant in situation where a complete reset occurs after a certain period or after termination of the intervention. It is doubtful whether this occurs in CRPS. The authors should explain their choice for this type of design and address this issue in the discussion.

In the discussion the efficacy of pain relief versus the side effects such as dizziness, somnolence and lethargy has to be evaluated. Do the advantages weigh up to the disadvantages caused by the side effects?

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

The authors should use original studies when referring background information in the text. For instance, reference 1 is not the proper reference when describing features of CRPS.

The authors have to explain why a population of chronic intractable CRPS patients has been chosen and what the possible consequences of this choice might be. Moreover, the co-medication and the follow up of CRPS indices have not been described adequately. For instance, it is questionable whether features such as edema, and skin temperature asymmetries can be described adequately by a physician without proper measurement instruments.

The lack of blinding in this study should be addressed in the discussion.

tables and figures:
content of table 1 does not agree with the description in the text. More legends should be provided with respect to the descriptive data in tables 2 and 3 (mean and SD?).
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:

yes, I have performed a lecture for Pfizer and received a fee for it.