Reviewer's report

Title: Differential Diagnosis of Tuberculous meningitis from partially treated cases of pyogenic meningitis by Cell ELISA.

Version: 3 Date: 11 August 2004

Reviewer: Guy Thwaites

Reviewer's report:

General
The authors have improved the report substantially, but their conclusions are still far too expansive. This is a small (and interesting) study that suggests a cell ELISA for the detection of antibodies to a 30KDa antigen MAY be useful in the diagnosis of tuberculous meningitis. It is not possible to conclude it will 'give confidence to physicians' or will be 'very useful in the differential diagnosis of TBM from PTPM'.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
As discussed above, the conclusions need to be toned down throughout the paper.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
Clarify in the abstract and results that the sensitivity and specificity were 11/12 respectively - it's not clear at present. Please reference earlier study of 30Kda antigen (paragraph 2). The last sentence of para 2 (of the Background) needs qualification: there have been plenty of small preliminary studies (similar to this one)that suggest a simple antibody capture ELISA for the diagnosis of TBM might be useful; although few of them have shown adequate performance in larger studies.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
I am not sure Figure 1 has any value. My understanding is that this shows the presence of 30Kda in pooled CSF from the cases of TBM recruited to this study. Therefore, it only provides evidence that the antigen was present in some, but not all patients. I suggest this figure is confusing and could be cut.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
None