Reviewer's report

Title: Cocaine use during pregnancy assessed by hair analysis in a Canary Islands cohort

Version: 4 Date: 28 September 2011

Reviewer: Melissa Whitworth

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Major compulsory revisions
(1) Some detail must be given as to how it was possible to get 374 consecutive patients to agree to participate in a study. It is highly unusual that no patients decline to enter a study

This has not been addressed which raises serious concerns in my mind about the consent process

(2) Why is a median value used for cocaine concentrations?

This has not been addressed

(3) There needs to be consistency of terminology. Generally 'substance misuse' is the accepted terminology rather than drugs of abuse of consumption

(4) Were customised growth charts used for birth weight - if not this needs to be done in order to allow comparison of the two groups

This has not been done

(5) 4.1 They say that hair testing was better than interview yet they make no previous mention of performing an interview. They previously say they handed out a survey which implies that the patient fills in the questionnaire

This has not been addressed

(6) 4.4 They suggest that their screening could provide proof for entering substance misuse treatment 'which is more effective during pregnancy' but their screening was done after delivery so this statement makes no sense.

This has not been addressed at all

(7) 3.1 had 22% had a previous termination of pregnancy or was this 22% combined spontaneous abortions and terminations of pregnancy

Addressed satisfactorily

(8) There is no data on whether the questionnaire used is validated either for use
in pregnancy or for use in general. The wording of questionnaires screening for substance misuse is very important and will impact on the validity of the data and on the likelihood of women disclosing personal information.

Putting in 'previously validated' and then using a reference which makes no comment on whether the questionnaire used in the study is validated or not i.e. Assessment of exposure to opiates and cocaine during pregnancy in a Mediterranean city: Preliminary results of the “Meconium Project” Pages 59-65 Simona Pichini, Carme Puig, Piergiorgio Zuccaro, Emilia Marchei, Manuela Pellegrini, Janeth Murillo, Oriol Vall, Roberta Pacifici, Óscar García-Algar is not reassuring.


Contains details of the validation process but this needs to be checked closely.

(9)With regards to the tables (1 and 2) it is usual to give a number and a % rather than just a %.

Addressed

The standard of English remains very poor with several sentences not making sense.

I do not feel the changes made justify publication.