Reviewer’s report

Title: Antenatal screening for Group B Streptococcus: A diagnostic cohort study

Version: Date: 12 April 2005

Reviewer: Alison Bedford-Russell

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The question posed by the authors is not new but the answers to the questions remain elusive and the study does contribute to the body of knowledge. The data should be published though could be improved with some revisions. It would help if the paper had been paginated.

In the abstract results it is stated that There is an unequivocal benefit in delaying screening until 36 weeks.. perhaps this should make clear that this statement is referring to the benefit being in terms of positivity of swabs. The introduction cites some old references for GBS infection. That by Heath et al (Lancet 2004;363:292-94) suggests that the incidence of GBS infection in infants of 31-33 weeks (though categorisation is by birthweight in that paper) is likely to be sufficiently significant that later screening may miss a very vulnerable group. This is also the group more likely to die of GBS infection. The evidence that 36 weeks is the optimal timing for taking swbs therefore remains contentious. The fact that a high risk strategy was not informative may just be a reflection of the definition of high risk in this paper. Most but not all risk factors are accounted for in the definition.

In the background, sound points are made but there are a number of old references cited and perhaps using more up to date references may be more informative. The interpretation of the data may also have been altered by the results of the more recent studies eh Heaths as above.

In the methods section the recruitment and Patient management secton could be more concise.

Analysis, sample size and results would benefit from review by a statistician. A significant finding is that colonistaion rates are 5-7% in the absence of selective broth and 20% when selective broths are used. This reinforces the need for use of selective broths. If statistically approved the tables provide interesting and useful data.

It appears that there is a companion paper. This reviewer wonders if the paper would have been strenghtened by amalgamating the data from what is presumably the same population.