Reviewer's report

Title: Incidence of leukemias in children from El Salvador and Mexico City between 1996 and 2000: Hospital prospective survey.

Version: 1 Date: 5 January 2005

Reviewer: Richard JQ McNally

Reviewer's report:

General

This is an important paper, because it presents new data on the incidence of childhood leukaemia in Mexico City and El Salvador. The data are population-based. However, this needs to be explained in the abstract. Furthermore, there are a number of points that need to be clarified (given below). Some comments regarding the incidence of 'childhood peak' ALL (1-4 years) and a comparison with other international data on 'childhood peak' ALL would be useful. The English requires some minor corrections.

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

(1) ABSTRACT. BACKGROUND. It is unclear precisely what age ranges were used. Should simply say '0-14 year olds' for Mexico and '0-11 year olds' for El Salvador. Should insert the word 'who' before 'attended'.

(2) ABSTRACT. METHODS. Again the age-groups should be more concisely specified as <1, 1-4, 5-9, 10-14 & 10-11 years. It is stated that this is a hospital prospective survey. Incidence rates can only be calculated if the study is population-based. Do the hospitals include all cases of leukaemia from well-defined geographical areas? This is explained later, but should also be stated here. It should be clearly stated that rates are per million children (also change the word 'for' to 'per').

(3) ABSTRACT. RESULTS. It should be clearly stated that rates are per million children.

(4) ABSTRACT. CONCLUSIONS. I do not understand the last sentence: "This is a start to improve the records of cancer in children in the area of Central America and Mexico". Reliable incidence rates can only be calculated if there are good records! It is certainly not an obvious conclusion.

(5) BACKGROUND, PARAGRAPH 1. This paragraph should be re-written. Specifically, socio-economic factors have been linked with 'childhood peak' ALL, occurring at ages 1-4 years. The last sentence seems redundant - it is clear that genetic or environmental factors may play a part in aetiology - suggest omit "Another factors.....or genetic factors." Also English slightly wrong in this last sentence.

(6) BACKGROUND, PARAGRAPH 2. Should be 'constraints' not 'restrains'.
(7) BACKGROUND, PARAGRAPH 3. Population-based data are required in order to correctly calculate incidence rates. It should be stressed again that the data are population-based.

(8) METHODS, ANALYSIS. The last sentence states that "Statistics were not performed to compare the rates....., because this was not the aim" seems out of place here - probably better in the discussion.

(9) DISCUSSION, PARAGRAPH 3. It should be stated that the rates are per million children - otherwise it is somewhat unclear.

(10) TABLES 1 & 2. There is some evidence for a childhood peak in ALL, especially for males in Mexico and females in El Salvador. Some comment regarding the 'childhood peak' should be made in the Discussion (see, for example, Little J (1999) Epidemiology of childhood cancer. Lyon: IARC (IARC Scientific Publications No. 149).

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

NONE

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

NONE

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I DECLARE THAT I HAVE NO COMPETING INTERESTS