Reviewer's report

Title: Expression of hepcidin mRNA is uniformly suppressed in hepatocellular carcinoma

Version: 1 Date: 25 March 2008

Reviewer: Yang Lian-Yue

Reviewer's report:

Comments:
In this study by Hiroaki K et al., the authors demonstrated that the expression of hepcidin mRNA was significantly decreased in HCC compared to the non-cancerous liver tissue and this decrease could correlate to the development of HCC, which is interesting. However, more evidences are still needed to show the correlation between the suppression of hepcidin mRNA and the progression of HCC. Some points in the manuscript need to be clarified and the manuscript could be strengthened in the following ways.

Major Compulsory Revisions:
1) The authors should provide the representative photograph of the real-time PCR results in “Results”;
2) The present data did not show the correlation between the decrease of hepcidin mRNA and the disease-free survival, but it is still necessary to analyze whether the suppression of hepcidin expression correlates to the overall survival of patients with HCC;
3) It is also necessary to investigate whether the expression level of hepcidin-mRNA correlates to the clinicopathological parameters such as the number of tumor, vein invasion and so on.
4) It is unclear whether there is significant correlation between the serum level of hepcidin-25 and TIBC, of which the P value is 0.113 (more than 0.05);
5) The potential reasons leading to no significant correlation between the serum concentration of hepcidin-25 and hepcidin-mRNA expression should be discussed in “Discussion”.

Minor Essential Revisions:
1) The non-cancerous liver tissue is not equal to normal liver tissue, the expression “normal liver” or “normal liver tissue” in manuscript should be replaced by “non-cancerous liver” or “non-cancerous liver tissue”, and the expression “had normal liver” in the end of the first paragraph of Page 5 should be replaced by “without chronic hepatitis or liver cirrhosis”;
2) The reference about the formula for calculating the level of hepcidin mRNA expression should be provided;
3) The authors should introduce how to set the normal serum level of hepcidin-25,
ferritin and TIBC in “Materials and Methods” or provide the relative references;
4) The protocol of LC-MS/MS should be introduced briefly in “Materials and Methods”;
5) The “Results” should be divided into several parts by subtitles;
6) The expression “strongly inhibited” in the last sentence of the first paragraph in
“Results” should be replaced by “significantly decreased”.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have
responded to the major compulsory 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, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a
statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests