Reviewer’s report

Title: The Use and Abuse of Paracetamol in Children by Caregivers in Enugu, South-east, Nigeria

Version: 3 Date: 18 April 2012

Reviewer: Urmila M Thatte

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Major Compulsory Revisions

Introduction
1. The drug is referred to as acetaminophen sometimes and paracetamol sometimes
2. The Introduction can be more succinct.

Methods:
1. If the service sees 840 patients per month why did the study include only 235 children over a 6 month period? The inclusion criteria mentioned do not indicate why so many children were not included?
2. The introduction clearly mentions, and I quote “This study assesses the administration of acetaminophen to under 6 children to identify patterns and factors associated with overdose.” However the methods section mentions the inclusion criteria as “Children aged between 6 weeks and 16 years and whose caregiver or parents gave consent”. There is some confusion about the age group actually studied.
3. From an ethics point of view, if older children were indeed recruited, was their “assent” obtained?
4. It is not clear how it was confirmed that the child had been given paracetamol and not any other medicine? How reliable was the verbal history of the care-giver in identifying the drug administered as paracetamol? What efforts were made to confirm this?

Results
1. The statistically significant difference reported in Table III is not completely clear as it is presented. Which groups differed (there are three age groups and three interventions) from which?
2. The manuscript says that “This study assesses the administration of acetaminophen to under 6 children to identify patterns and factors associated with overdose” – however there is no attempt at assessing the actual dose given/taken by the child. How would overdose or abuse be measured?

Statistics:
1. The methods section does not clarify what was being analysed. What tests were used? For what was the level of significance set? Sample size calculation is also not mentioned

Discussion:

1. One of the statements that the authors raise in the discussion is “From this study majority of the paracetamol administered to our children are self prescribed with a possible tendency of abuse and overdose”. As paracetamol is an OTC drug this observation is expected. Also the results of the study in no way really convince me that there is potential for overdose as no attempts have been made to find out the knowledge, attitude or practices of the caregivers in determining the dose or administering paracetamol

2. The conclusions and recommendations made by the authors (while may be true based on a lot of other generated literature) cannot be said to have stemmed from this study

3. The discussion does not mention the limitations of the study

References:

1. The references are old and may not be relevant today (e.g. the 15th edition dated 1996 of Nelson’s Book of Pediatrics is quoted while the current edition is the 19th edition dated 2011. Several more recent references on the topic are also available

2. The references are not written in order. I cannot seem to find reference 9. Two references - Utpal et al and Grandins et al are numbered 4 while Abbott et al and Thomas et al are numbered 14

3. Some references are incomplete (e.g. reference no. 7, 12)

General Comments

1. The style of the paper is more in the form of a protocol than a research paper

2. The objective/research question is not very clearly defined or described in the introduction although it is mentioned in a later section of aims and objectives.

3. The title is “The Use and Abuse of Paracetamol in Children by Caregivers in Enugu, South-east, Nigeria” however the study does not really assess abuse and is therefore misleading

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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