Reviewer’s report

Title: Depression and loneliness in Jamaicans with sickle cell disease

Version: 1 Date: 9 January 2010

Reviewer: Tami Benton

Reviewer’s report:

This is an important study about an understudied problem in the SCD population. The authors are examining the prevalence patterns of depression and loneliness in a population of adults with SCD in Jamaica. It is an observational study that could provide information about depression, and loneliness as potential risk factors for poor medical outcomes. Although it is an observational study, cross sectional study of these phenomena, the authors hope to identify risk factors for this group. The following concerns need to be addressed and explained before this paper is published.

1. The authors identified the problems with the use of the BDI to diagnose depression. They should explain how the use of this instrument affects reported prevalence rates. Depression scores reported across the range would strengthen paper: Were most participants mildly, moderately or severely depressed? Did severity impact loneliness scores?

2. How was the control group recruited?

3. How was the sample lost to follow up similar or different than participants?

4. How do we distinguish loneliness from the social isolation accompanying severe depression?

5. Which subscale scores for the loneliness scales were elevated? Which relationships were most impacted or were all types of relationships impacted the same?

6. Descriptive analysis of data was acceptable. However, the results may be overstated. In an observational study, one can describe associations but not causality? Authors describe specific risk factors for depression and loneliness. Please describe how your data supports this.

7. Discussion overstates findings. Associations versus predictors of depression and loneliness.

8. Discussion should be expanded: Thoughts about differences in SC vs SS findings? Literature discussing the differences in coping with illness observed in SC? More discussion regarding distinctions and confounding in determining depression from loneliness? What are the implications of these findings and how does this affect treatment? Why are these findings important? Future directions? Do the authors have screening and treatment recommendations?

9. Update references. More recent references available on mood disorders in medically ill. Evans DL et al 2005; Biological psychiatry: Mood Disorders in the
Medically Ill;
Should include a description of the psychometric properties of the instruments used for the studies.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.