Reviewer’s report

Title: The French Observational Cohort of Usual Smokers (FOCUS) cohort: French smokers perceptions and attitudes towards smoking cessation.

Version: 1 Date: 20 November 2009

Reviewer: Rodrigo Tango

Reviewer’s report:

Comments on the manuscript of Aubin et al., 2009

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

Yes, but the study question is well defined in the text but it is not clearly defined in the abstract. Revision suggested: the study objective should be clearly stated in the abstract, not only implicit.

(If there are space constraints, I believe that a phrase about the study goals is more useful than this one: “Despite increasing government anti-smoking measures, smoking prevalence remain at a high level in France.”)

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The methods are well described and they are appropriate to the study goal. However, I disagree with the classification of "heavy smokers" as people who smoked 13 or more cigarettes per day. I see the following possibilities for improvement. Either the vague term "heavy smokers" should be replaced by something more precise, e.g., "smokers above the median consumption", either the term "heavy smokers" should relate to a level of dependence on the Fagerström scale.

3. Are the data sound?

Most results are coherent with the literature on tobacco cessation in other developed countries. The smoking prevalence data seem at odds with the literature, but the authors acknowledge the fact that these data are unexpected, and they provide some hypotheses which could explain it.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The manuscript contains tabulated data on the stated study outcomes. If more complete data reporting is needed, that could be achieved by providing the raw data (i.e., non-tabulated) as a web annex.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported
by the data?
Yes.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

One limitation could be discussed at more length. The study population over-represents retired subjects, which is normal with the method used for data collection. However, previous studies show that smoking prevalence declines with age. Hence, I suggest that the authors discuss the risk that a bias in sample selection affects smoking prevalence results. They could add some words on why selection bias can affect the results of prevalence studies in general, then explain what was done in this particular study to minimise that risk.

Also, in the first paragraph of the results section, it is stated that subjects older than 75 were excluded. Hence, the limitations section could contain some words on how that exclusion affects the external validity of the study.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes, e.g. in the section on study design.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes, the title accurately conveys what one would expect to find in the article. The abstract could be clearer on the study goals, but it clearly conveys what has been found.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.