Reviewer's report

Title: Referrals to a regional allergy clinic - an eleven year audit

Version: 1 Date: 6 September 2010

Reviewer: Gian Enrico Senna

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

The Authors performed an audit on the problem of allergic diseases, addressing their changes over time, their spatial distribution, co-occurrence and their referral pattern in a routine tertiary practice level. The study was carried out in a well defined geographic boundary. A fairly large number of cases have been collected and evaluated. A careful statistical analysis has been performed leading to some interesting conclusions.

Nevertheless the study shows some flaws. Diagnosis of allergic diseases is based on skin or IgE specific dosage. However the results are not merely positive or negative but every positivity has to be quantified. This is very relevant from a clinical point of view as mild positivities have no clinical relevance and can be also neglected. Therefore before including a subject among the allergic patients some criteria have to be clearly defined, according to pre-established a cut off. In fact the inclusion of patients with negligible skin or RAST positivity among the allergic patients can lead to an inconsistency of the final data.

This is even more relevant if we consider the association of inhalant and food allergy. In fact up to 40% of patients with pollenosis have skin of specific IgE positivities to foods (generally vegetables). Nevertheless these positivities can be clinically negligible and in this case the association cannot be considered relevant.

Did the Authors include among food allergic patients also subjects with non IgE mediated food allergy ? In this case criteria for inclusion have to be clearly detailed.

Minor essential revisions

Paragraph: Results

Concerning “allergy cases as a proportion of all referrals” patients with inhalant allergy and food allergy have to be treated and evaluated separately.

Similarly there are differences regarding the age of patients with food and inhalant allergy ?

The study include some patients allergic to penicillin. Was the diagnosis based only on history or proper test had been performed ? In this case they have to be detailed. In case of allergy to penicillins is based only on history is has to be pointed out the high risk of false positivities.

Paragraph: Discussion
The role of allergy is generally crucial only in acute urticaria and it is negligible in chronic. So the discussion has to be referred only to acute urticaria

Discretionary revisions
The number of tables and figures seem to be excessive. I suggest to reduce them as soon as possible maintaining only the most relevant

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
Personal conflicts of interest : none