Reviewer's report

Title: Recruitment and variability in risk factors and biomarkers from a multi-center study: Is a prospective cohort of diet feasible in India?

Version: 1 Date: 14 February 2011

Reviewer: Alpa Patel

Reviewer's report:

Summary: The authors present results from their pilot work for a study of diet and chronic disease risk in India. The topic is extremely important and timely in considering the establishment of a prospective study in India, given its substantial population size and relative under-representation in these types of observational studies. Overall, this is a very well-written manuscript of great public health importance. The data regarding the ability to recruit participants and collect a variety of data through biologic samples and questionnaires is soundly presented, but greater discussion about the logistical considerations and challenges would greatly strengthen the manuscript.

Major revisions:

1. The authors should state in the introduction why they are focusing on cancer more than other chronic diseases for the study. While cancer is of great public health interest and may be a greater public health concern in the Indian population as western lifestyle is more readily adopted, cardiovascular disease and type II diabetes currently are more prevalent in the Indian population. The framework of the study should be put in context of the disease(s) of interest.

2. The authors state in the introduction that the “infrastructure in India necessary” for issues related to follow-up may not be adequate, but then do not describe here or in the discussion what the present feasibility of follow-up is. Greater detail of this point in the discussion would be helpful in assessing the true feasibility of such a study.

3. The authors should consider adding some detail in the methods section about the outreach strategies utilized as they subsequently discuss these strategies in the discussion section.

4. The authors should consider presenting methods and results for evaluating the logistical challenges with collection, transport, and storage of samples. They devote a paragraph in the discussion (page 15) to this topic, but do not present any information prior to this. In considering the feasibility of conducting such a study on a broader scale, these logistical issues are as critical as the participation rates and other data presented and may ultimately be the reason why such a study is not currently feasible.

5. The conclusion should also highlight the logistical challenges that would need to be overcome in expanding a study of this magnitude.
Minor revisions:
1. The authors should include a statement in the abstract about the uncertainty regarding the ability to follow a population, once recruited. This is a vital component for prospective studies which is worthy of mention in the abstract.

2. In the “follow up projections” section of the methods, the authors only present expected number of cancer cases. Again (per earlier comment #2), the authors should either state the primary focus of the study is cancer or pay equal consideration to other highly prevalent chronic diseases.

Discretionary revisions:
1. At the end of the discussion, the authors should make the point that while generalizability may be an issue, internal validity of study results would not be compromised with high follow-up rates.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interests.