Reviewer’s report

Title: Trends in all cause and liver-related hospitalizations in people with hepatitis B or C: a population-based linkage study

Version: 1 Date: 27 August 2010

Reviewer: Stephen Roberts

Reviewer’s report:

The authors have a strong record of using record linkage for studies in this area. This paper addresses a clearly defined research question about the relative hospitalised morbidity - and their trends - among people diagnosed with hep B and hep C. The methodology is well thought through. The finding of divergent trends in hospital admissions for non-alcoholic liver disease among people with hep B and hep C is important.

Minor essential revisions

1). Methods, page 4, para 2
The authors state that admissions were categorized according to the principal (first) diagnostic code. Presumably this is the principal diagnosis at discharge rather than at admission?

2). Methods, page 5, paras 1 to 3
The technical details provided about the record linkage methods would not be familiar to many readers. They could be simplified or placed in an Appendix.

3). Discussion, page 12, para 2
An additional study limitation that should be stated is that the trend analyses are based on relatively few years (seven).

4). Could the divergence of trends in hospital admissions for non-alcoholic liver disease among people with hep B and hep C be related to differences in case ascertainment for the two disorders? This should be discussed in more detail in the Discussion.

Discretionary revisions

1). Methods, page 4, paras 1 and 2
The authors cite several study information sources (NSW NDD, NHR, NAR, APDC) which should ideally be referenced.

2). Methods page 5, para 4
It would be informative if the authors could provide the numbers of cases that failed each of the exclusion criteria.
3). The study provides morbidity outcomes for non alcoholic liver disease. Similar information for alcoholic liver disease would also be of interest.

4). The paper would also be strengthened if some information on relative mortality could be included.

5). Presentation and formatting of the Figures could be improved.

**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.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests