Reviewer’s report

Title: Tuberculosis and homelessness in Montreal: A retrospective cohort study

Version: 5 Date: 29 August 2011

Reviewer: Kamran Khan

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Overall this is a well done descriptive study of homelessness and TB in Montreal over the span of more than a decade. it includes clinical information, microbiological data and molecular fingerprinting data which adds to its interest. The small sample size of just 20 homeless patients limits the lessons that can be learned, but the comparison to non-homeless individuals offers an interesting perspective. Some specific comments have been included as suggestions.

Page 8 – “and applied a non-parametric test to compare medians of continuous variables.” Which test is this exactly?

Page 9 – “While only 292/1803 (16%) of non-homeless patients were born in Canada, 17/20 (85%) homeless TB patients were Canadian-born (OR=28, 95% CI: 8.1-96)” Might it be clearer to indicate that 84% of non-homeless patients were foreign born, while 85% of homeless TB patients were Canadian born? The comparison here (if accurately stated) more readily demonstrates that significance of the contrast between the two groups.

Page 10 – “All 20 homeless patients had pulmonary TB, of whom 17 (85%) had smear-positive disease (OR=5.7, 95% CI: 1.7-20).” Do you know how smear positive they were? i.e. numerous, few etc?

“The largest cluster (12 cases) included 8 homeless patients and 4 others, spanning 11 years. Three smaller clusters included 6 (1 homeless plus 5 others), 6 (1 plus 5) and 2 patients (1 - and 1) respectively. It might be worth using the words homeless and others in all parentheses for clarity.

General comments – homeless persons and homeless patients are used interchangeably. Consistency with one term would be preferable.

Was HIV testing done in all patients? This is a challenge in many studies because the denominators of HIV tested patients are often much smaller than the total sample size of the population (i.e. the HIV status of many individuals is unknown even though they were confirmed to have active TB)


The authors might want to compare their findings with a recent EID study of
homelessness and TB in Toronto over 10 years to highlight any significant similarities or differences.

http://www.cdc.gov/eid/content/17/3/357.htm

Figure 2 and Figure 4 – the symbology on the maps to the left are difficult to see – perhaps they could be shown as an inset map highlighting the area of interest while the more detailed maps to the right could become larger allowing the symbols to be viewed more easily.

**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 have no competing interests.