Reviewer’s report

Title: Assessing the Validity of Tuberculosis Surveillance Data in California

Version: 1 Date: 16 March 2006

Reviewer: giovanni battista migliori

Reviewer’s report:

General
The study is aimed at assessing systematically the validity and completeness of reported TB surveillance data in California (verified cases of TB) and to inform the CDC revision process. Data from a stratified random sample of 596 cases had been analysed. The study has a clear question, methods are appropriate, results are well controlled and conclusions are consistent with results. The paper is interesting and easy to read. The main general comment, aimed at improving the paper’s readability, is that the Authors missed the opportunity to discuss other experiences outside the US. In several low incidence countries discussion is presently going on quality and consistency of TB recording and reporting data, and some published papers are available on the topic (see comment 2a, b, c).

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
1) First paragraph: Recording and recording is a key pillar of DOTS, the WHO-recommended strategy of TB control. This strategy has been recently re-formulated (e.g. see Lancet 2006;367:952-954). Suggestions are given to 1) mention DOTS in the introduction; 2) add a reference; c) add a comment in the discussion session, e.g. in the last paragraph of page 5, where DOT is mentioned.
2) 2a) The study had a perspective limited to the US, California. The suggestion is to discuss other relevant experience, to allow the reader to understand how important this topic is within a TB control programme. In all (low incidence) countries, without valid recording and reporting data (including treatment outcomes), the programme performances cannot be evaluated.
2b) The first sentence of the discussion session should be: This is the first study... in the USA.
2c) Suggestion is given to include as a reference the TB surveillance recommendations for Europe by HL Rieder et al, focusing on the core essential variables necessary to evaluate a national TB control programme.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests. GB Migliori