Reviewer's report

Title: Can current national surveillance systems in England and Wales monitor sexual transmission of hepatitis C among HIV-infected men who have sex with men?

Version: 1 Date: 30 September 2006

Reviewer: Onno de Zwart

Reviewer's report:

General
The article is an interesting and well written study on important topic about which only limited data are available. The article makes an important contribution to the debate as it gives national data where before almost all data were limited to reports on specific cities.

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

- Although information is given on the median age at HIV and HCV diagnosis the paper does not differentiate between chronic and acute HCV-infections. This distinction is important in light of sexual transmission especially for contact tracing. Sometimes there is also a different testing regime where first Anti-HCV-Elisa is conducted and if this results in a positive diagnosis HCV-RNA-PCR will take place. The paper would benefit if the testing regime for HCV for both the HCV data sets would be described and also - if data are available - how many acute HCV infections where reported.

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)

- The first data set are HCV infections reported to the HPA. It is not quite clear whether these reports are the results of HCV being a notifiable disease in the UK. In the Netherlands acute HCV infections are a notifiable diseases and must be reported to the Municipal or Regional Public Health Service. It would help if the authors could describe whether notification is obligatory in the UK. As often notifications are also used in surveil lance.
- On page 13 it is written that Manchester has a good reporting of both HIV and HCV. Some more information may be helpful whether the rate of matching in the different regions is related to the number of infections. Although it is mentioned it warrants some more attention.
- Table 1 is only for the HCV diagnoses reported to the HPA, could such table also be provided for the sentinel HCV testing.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory 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