Reviewer's report

Title: Predictors of Poisoning-Related Fatality: A Hospital-Based Prospective Study

Version: 2  Date: 26 April 2007

Reviewer: Dexter Tagwireyi

Reviewer's report:

General

On the whole I found the idea of investigating predictors of poisoning related fatalities to be a very good and stimulating one. What made this work more interesting is the fact that the authors did a prospective study of over 1000 patients - which is quite a feat in Clinical Toxicology. Most studies describing toxicoepidemiological parameters in the field of Clinical Toxicology are from retrospective surveys, some time of smaller numbers of patients.

However, despite this advantage of having done a prospective study on a large population, the authors did not do a very good job of presenting their results. They failed to bring out clearly the important points that they wanted to come out. Eventually, too many issues were presented in a not so clear way, making it difficult to keep in track with the authors' original intentions.

In addition the paper was marred with numerous grammatical errors making it very difficult to read and understand. This was moreso in the discussion section of this work. Because this work could bring out some interesting data, if the authors' intend to resubmit it either to this journal or elsewhere, I would suggest that they did the following:

1. Make sure that the version to be submitted is revised thoroughly for grammatical errors: these make reading the paper over difficult and "put off" the reviewer
2. The authors would need to decide on exactly what they want to present in their results and make sure that the main points come out clearly - as the paper stands, the results are quite difficult to follow and there are too many issues that are presented
3. Together with the above point, it would be worthwhile to separate the results into different sections with separate subheading, e.g., Patient Demographic Details, Mortality - and other related headings. This has the effect of making it easier for the reader to follow the results and pick out key and important points.
4. It may be worthwhile also to utilise graphs and charts to summarise some of the information, with text highlighting on pertinent facts. Tables with text alone is quite messy and hard to follow.
5. There is generally no need to continue repeating both numbers and proportions, e.g., on page 11 line 5, "...drugs (773/1548, 49.9%)..." this is messy and repetitious not adding much. You may want to stick more to percentages.
6. The authors should be careful of your use of words like all and none especially when they represent a subpopulation - I was confused on some occasions about this use, e.g., page 11 paragrapg 2 line 3, "...traced in 71.6% of ALL patients..." which patients are referred to as "all"
7. Where possible the authors should show the relative contributions of groups involved, e.g., when talking about the pesticides involved in fatal cases, the authors did not give the relative contributions of each; yet in the discussion they isolate paraquat as an important cause of fatality. But the results did not show that.
8. The discussion was not written well. It read more like a literature review rather than a discussion - there was little effort made to address major results. the authors should attempt to discuss their results. As a general guide they can try answering the following:
   - what has other work from the country, region shown
   - what about work from other countries
   - why are there similarities and if differences, why are they there
   - what do the results mean and what impact will they have
9. The authors should be careful to quote correctly what other researchers reported on, for example they state in their paper that Tagwireyi and colleagues reported that paraquat was a problem (ref. 42) - this is not correct.
10. Conclusions have to follow from the results and discussion. The authors should ensure that all the things that they conclude - they have mentioned them elsewhere in their paper.
11. The authors may need to change their title to reflect the other issues that they reported in - the way the title stads is quite misleading.
Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

If this paper is to be accepted, the points above should be addressed - especially the language issue as well as the results and discussion.

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)

What next?: Reject because scientifically unsound

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'