Reviewer's report

Title: Potential and Actual Rabies Exposure in People and Domestic Animals, Upstate South Carolina, 1995-2003: A Surveillance Study

Version: 1 Date: 23 June 2008

Reviewer: Jesse Blanton

Reviewer's report:

This study provides a unique look at domestic animal exposure and the role of pets as rabies vectors from wildlife species (and underlines the importance of domestic animal vaccination as the front line in preventing human rabies exposure). However, the some discussion of the findings in regards to human rabies postexposure prophylaxis would strenghten the paper.

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. Could the authors provide some insight into their findings in regards to human rabies postexposure prophylaxis. Some discussion regarding potential exposure and human PEP administration would strengthen this paper, as this is the ultimate public health and financial burden of exposure. Similarly regarding euthanasia, quarantine and observation of potentially exposed domestic animals. Did PEP administration reflect the relative rate of exposure in the study area over the time studied? For reference

2. Pg10, 3rd paragraph – Please provide additional support for cats as reservoirs vs vectors of rabies or clarify meaning. To date there has been no evidence of cats acting as a primary reservoir of rabies or any Lyssavirus. Additional viral characterization and laboratory support should be provided and would constitute a separate publication if so.

Discretionary Revisions
1. Background /Second paragraph – May want to clarify South Carolina surveillance vs. national surveillance. Currently there is no national surveillance for human or animal exposure or for rabies postexposure prophylaxis.

2. Background / Second Paragraph – Suggest updating citation to 2008 ACIP recommendations regarding human exposure. May also consider referencing 2008 Rabies Compendium for domestic animal exposures as these are not covered under the ACIP recommendations.

3. Results / Could the authors also provide the rate of human exposure for the study population?

4. Results / Pg7, 4th paragraph – by “exposed to rabies” do the authors mean exposed to animals with a laboratory confirmation of rabies?

5. Results / Pg7, 4th paragraph – in the third sentence please specify exposures to animals, in 4th sentence why are skunks and bats lumped together?

7. Discussion / Pg9, 2nd paragraph – The authors state that dogs are more frequently reported as victims of animal incidents than cats. Could the authors comment on bias due to ownership status as well as relative population difference between dogs and cats.

8. Discussion / Pg10, 2nd paragraph – In the first sentence regarding rabies virus variant. Did no human or animal exposure to a confirmed rabid bat occur in this study population?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests:

None