Reviewer’s report

Title: Lung function decline in relation to diagnostic criteria for airflow obstruction in respiratory symptomatic subjects

Version: 3 Date: 16 February 2012

Reviewer: Marco Contoli

Reviewer’s report:

At page 6 of the revised version the manuscript reads “The aim of the study reported in this paper was to assess lung function decline in symptomatic middle-aged and elderly subjects identified as ‘obstructive’ according to either the fixed 0.70 FEV1/FVC cutpoint or an age- and gender-specific LLN cutpoint for this ratio”. However in the point-by-point responses to my criticisms the authors state: “The aim of the study was to look at the main criterion to decide whether or not airflow obstruction is present in a subject who consults a (primary care) physician with respiratory symptoms”. I totally agree with the authors that the gender-specific LLN cutpoint is the best parameter to evaluate airflow obstruction in elderly patients. However if the aim is to evaluate lung function decline it must be considered that “concordant patients (i.e LLN+Fixed+”) are significantly more severe (according to GOLD criteria of severity, i.e. postbronchodilator FEV1) and this bias can influence the conclusions.

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 declare that I have no competing interests