Reviewer's report

Title: Smoking and asthma in young people: evidence from postal questionnaire surveys in the Wythenshawe Community Asthma Project (WYCAP).

Version: 2 Date: 28 March 2006

Reviewer: George Chalmers

Reviewer's report:

General
This study investigates the association between smoking and asthma in adults less than 45 years old, using a population based survey which has previously reported other findings in relation to respiratory health. The study differs from previous literature in this area by examining young adults, and in the use of different criteria for an asthma diagnosis, and as such adds to the current knowledge. The study demonstrates a positive relationship between smoking and asthma as defined by the presence of 4/6 positive responses to specific questions in the survey. Ex-smokers had similar rates of asthma to never-smokers.

In general the study is well-conceived, well designed and well presented. Little direct information is given about the total study group, with information only about responders (there is reference to other publications where response rates are published). The survey indicates a relatively high prevalence of both smoking and asthma in the population examined.

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

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

Some of the references quoted in the discussion have not appeared in the correct format (NHLBI 2005, and Ulrik 2005).

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Although the study assesses responses from young adults, no lower age limit is stated.

The study demonstrates a high smoking rate and also a high asthma rate - comparison of smoking and asthma rates from other studies in relation to socio-economic factors would be of value. Is it possible to estimate a “smoking-attributable” asthma prevalence, given that atopy does not appear to contribute.

The study found a higher prevalence of asthma in males compared with females. This is an unusual finding which merits some discussion in comparison with other studies.

The assertion that the diagnosis is unlikely to be COPD if subjects are less than 45 years old is plausible, but is open to question in the light of other work such as Geijer RM et al Family Practice Oct 2005; 22:485 indicating undetected persistent airflow obstruction in middle-aged smokers. The authors have discussed the possibility of misclassification due to early stage COPD, but this section in the discussion should be expanded on.
Online publication of actual questionnaire as an archive file would be advantageous to allow others to compare methodology.

**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