Reviewer’s report

Title: Serum VEGF levels are related to the presence of Pulmonary Arterial Hypertension in Systemic Sclerosis

Version: 1 Date: 1 December 2008

Reviewer: Janet Pope

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The study is comparing VEGF levels to elevated right heart pressures via echo in SSc. Although interesting, there are changes that are needed. For instance it is not PAH that is being studied but elevated pressures on echo. The total N of SSc is not known and exclusion criteria are not provided. The sample is relatively small at n=40. How many were excluded via lack of consent, cardiac findings already on left heart and smoking ,etc. Was the project ethics approved and was a consent form signed? The reference 18 needs to be given on page 8 after the first mention of the MRC dyspnea score. How were the controls selected? Who were they. They are not fully matched for gender. How were there so many with elevated PA pressure estimates in the SSc patients if only 10 to 15% of SSc has PAH. You need to give the data for those with true R heart cath proven PAH. This would make the results fare more meaningful. State in methods that logistic regression was done to adjust for skin score, limited vs diffuse, disease duration etc. On page 14 the Rsquared of each should be provided in the text, not just the p values.(DLCO, dyspnea, etc). Page 16 - How do we know that VEGF is not abnormal due to local hypoxia?

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:

I declare that I have no competing interests. Janet Pope