Reviewer's report

**Title:** Evidence for HSV-1-induced pneumonitis in patients under standard immunosuppressive therapy for rheumatic and vasculitic autoimmune disease

**Version:** 2 **Date:** 15 December 2008

**Reviewer:** Johan Groeneveld

**Reviewer's report:**

General.
This paper reports on the difficulty in ascertaining that HSV-1 isolation is indeed responsible for pneumonitis in critical illness. The 4 cases are well described and clearly illustrate the points raised already in the literature, that a microorganisms does not necessarily imply disease. A number of issues can be addressed.

Major.
1. The rationale of the (retrospective) study is vague, particularly if the authors start by saying that (ref 7,8,9,10) HSV-1 pneumonitis can occur in immunodepressed patients. So what is new in the current series? The comparability with intensive care literature where isolation of HSV-1 can be doubted as sufficient proof of pneumonitis during mechanical ventilation in seemingly non-immune depressed patients is relatively poor. What is the point? Please specify your study goals. To go on further, the lack of focus of the manuscript results in many words and statements that may distract from the main message, that is, as this reviewer feels it, that pathogenicity is hard to proof, even in immunodepressed patients and should be actively looked for before starting (but without delaying) treatment (the clinical problem). The paper could be improved by focusing and condensing.

Please be careful in stating that you identified a new risk factor, since a formal risk analysis was not done.
2. The lack of positive BAL viral cultures and the (over)re-
liance on PCR techniques introduces, as correctly discussed, the issue of too high sensitivity at the cost of low specificity. Any pathological findings on bronchoscopy? Erosions? Images? The authors may have not gone far enough to prove/disprove pathogenicity in their patients.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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'