Reviewer’s report

Title: Cholesteatoma of the external ear canal. Etiological factors, symptoms and clinical findings in a series of 48 cases.

Version: 1 Date: 6 December 2006

Reviewer: Anthony Wright

Reviewer’s report:

General
There is nothing wrong with this paper except that it is far too long.

Repetition and proliferation are rife and need to be trimmed.

The paper is simple. The title is aetiological factors, symptoms and clinical findings in 48 cases of ear canal cholesteatoma (ECC). The paper goes on to discuss the background to this rare condition and shows that half their cases are idiopathic and half have a possible causal agent with certain caveats. It may be that the ECC caused an irritation which necessitated the use of cotton buds rather than the reverse

The paper does not define what it means by ECC since it only reports other papers (including mine) and it does not include any histological descriptions. The authors must have operated on most of the patients and the histology should be included in the clinical findings section of the paper since it is so interesting (well I think so).

If the paper can be shortened – ask a colleague to read it and edit it down – and some diagnostic and histological studies be included then this paper would be worthy of publication As it stands it is a rather tedious reiteration of the literature with no obvious advice as to how to deal with this difficult problem.. The authors have a great set of data but somehow this has become, in effect, an audit paper with no suggestions for improving diagnosis and treatment.

Recommendations:

Major revision: to reduce the length of the paper and inclusion of their definition of the condition, the histological features to distinguish the condition from keratosis obturans and details of management strategies.

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

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)