Reviewer's report

Title: Corticosteroid prescribing in palliative care settings: a retrospective analysis in New Zealand

Version: 1 Date: 26 May 2013

Reviewer: Stephen Barclay

Reviewer's report:

I read this paper with interest - the use of corticosteroids in palliative care is an important area. I think this is a useful paper, but have the following comments to make before a final decision on publication can be made:

Major compulsory revisions:

P7. Give more information of how you sampled the 260 of 768 patients were included in the study.

P8. No information is given concerning the patient sample - cancer / non-cancer, survival times, age + sex. Did all die in hospice or were some discharged to community and lost to followup?

One weakness of the study is that the only data available was that recorded in records - were some of the differences found related to different recording practices between hospices, or genuinely due to different prescribing practices? This needs to be addressed further in the discussion.

Minor essential revisions

P5. Expand on the impact of these drug interactions on drug effects, and add zopiclone as mentioned later.

P7. Insert 95% confidence interval of 2.8%.

P7. Only inpatient notes were accessed - did the data therefore only relate to periods spent as an inpatient? If so, that limits the data considerably.

P7. Please report all statistical analyses undertaken to permit assessment of potential for Type 1 errors.

P9. Adverse effects - how were these defined and documented? No data is given concerning these at all.

P11. No data given re dose ranges, just a statement that they were similar.

Discretionary revisions

P6. Suggest you describe the hospice sampling as purposive. Good to see the pilot data were used to generate sample size calculations.

P13. I am surprised by the comment that steroids are low risk for causing GI side effects / heamorrhage in this population in the absence of NSAIDs. What is the evidence for this assertion?
It is stated that the results are mirrored in the international literature - so what is new about this paper to convince an editor that it should be published?

**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 I have no competing interests