Reviewer's report

Title: Development of explicit criteria for cataract extraction by phacoemulsification

Version: 2 Date: 17 August 2005

Reviewer: Joanne Tobacman

Reviewer's report:

General
The authors have devised a classification scheme that may be very useful for ophthalmologists who perform cataract surgery. They have responded to the critique acceptably in many regards.

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

1. Please revise the Abstract and the Discussion (p.14) to omit the phrase about phacoemulsification being developed in the last decade.

2. Please review the Rand definition of uncertain. It includes two groups: those scenarios in which the mean panel rating was 4,5, or 6 and those scenarios in which there was substantial disagreement among the panelists, with at least two scores of 1,2, or 3 and two scores of 7,8, or 9 after discarding the lowest and highest scores (essentially three scores from 1-3 and three scores from 7-9). These are identified as uncertain, not appropriate or inappropriate. This classification is not reflected in the authors' response #1, although stated correctly on page 8 where they state that uncertain is "if the median rating was between 4 and 6 or if the members of the panel disagreed." The amended text (p.8) requires further clarification ("indetermined if agreement nor disagreement was found").

It does not seem reasonable on the part of the authors to recommend omission of some conditions from inclusion in development of explicit criteria because they are uncommon. If they are excluded from consideration this may lead automatically to no intervention, when, in fact, intervention may be beneficial. As experience with procedures changes over time, it may seem less risky to perform a procedure, and what was initially uncertain due to lack of experience, may evolve to appropriate. If panelists are unfamiliar with risk/benefit of a procedure for an unusual clinical condition, then they can rate this as uncertain. Circumstances such as this can form the basis for a multi-center clinical trial of a clinical condition that occurs with low frequency, and investigators can combine their experience and acquire clinical evidence of risk and benefit. The uncertain category can guide development of clinical trials.

The authors have extended the definition of activities of daily living and should indicate explicitly what they are including, since this is beyond the Basic ADLS or the Intermediate ADLs.

Digits are still reversed for the number of inappropriate in Round 2 in Table 1. Should be 283, not 238.

Calculation of the misclassification error and the kappa scores needs to be reviewed by a statistician. It is not clear how the disagreement rate of 0.9% was determined. (p.11, line 4). The kappa scores are extremely high and the method used for calculating these should be reviewed and included.

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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)

Please consider the language with regard to surgical complexity (p.6 and p.25). "No surgical complications anticipated" (p.6, paragraph 3, line 13; p.25, #5, e) might describe better the group in whom the risk of surgical complication is low, rather than "no surgical complications".

The word data is plural (p.8).

It is not clear if the panelists received the "conformity score" or not. Receipt of this might bias the second round of ratings towards greater conformity.

An "important" number (p.18, line 2) should be re-worded to a "large" number.

Page 26, #7 cataract.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.