Reviewer's report

**Title:** Descriptive epidemiology of chronic liver disease in North-Eastern Italy: an analysis of multiple causes of death

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 7 August 2013

**Reviewer:** Martin McKee

**Reviewer's report:**

**Major Compulsory Revisions**

1. This topic is important. There is a growing and often hidden burden of disease from hepatitis C, so anything that makes it more visible is important. However, the question is not entirely clear. The paper does what it says in the title. It reports “descriptive epidemiology”. However, it is necessary to turn this into an answerable, policy-relevant question such as “To what extent do routine mortality data underestimate the burden of mortality from chronic liver disease of different aetiologies?” The answers are largely in the paper but it would benefit from a sharper focus throughout. This would help to focus the discussion and conclusions too.

2. It is not easy to see how the expansion of the CLD diagnoses impacts on the cases included. This could most easily be addressed by expanding table 1 and using numbers instead of percentages. What I want to know is the number of additional cases with a mention of alcohol or hepatitis are included when moving from the most restrictive of the three strategies. In other words, does adding codes for chronic viral hepatitis also sweep up a lot of cases with alcohol-related causes or not?

**Minor Essential Revisions**

3. The paper requires considerable editing, with a number of words used inappropriately, such as “relevant”, which I take to mean “substantial”.

**Discretionary Revisions**

4. I felt that the list of alcohol-related causes that was included was overly restrictive. Why not also X45 (alcohol poisoning), W78-9 (inhalation of gastric contents), and I42.6 (alcoholic cardiomyopathy) (and maybe also pancreatitis)?

5. I am not sure that the geographical analysis adds much but do not feel strongly about this.

6. Although the policy implications are touched upon, this could be developed further.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

None