Reviewer's report

Title: Predictors of pain intensity and persistence in a prospective Italian cohort of patients with herpes zoster: relevance of smoking, trauma and antiviral therapy.

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Reviewer: Ravi Mahalingam

Reviewer's report:

Parruti et al. report their analysis of pain intensity during acute zoster as well as the incidence of PHN and its predictors. Their sample size (441 individuals) is sufficient and their extensive analysis is thorough. Although the authors discuss the generally accepted definition of PHN as pain persisting for more than 3 months post zoster, their consideration pain being a continuum and their choice to quantify the total amount of pain individual patient through 3 months, using the AUC method, is not completely clear. In addition to the current analysis, it will be helpful to analyze their observations taking into consideration the above mentioned definition of PHN.

From earlier studies from several other groups, it is clear that reduction in cell-mediated immunity due to aging is an important factor in herpes zoster and PHN. It will be useful if the authors directly correlate their observation with age.

The importance of use of antiviral treatment during acute zoster is clear.

The rationale for studying cigarette smoking as a factor in PHN needs to be clarified in their introduction.

Minor comments:

What is the definition of ZAP?

In the methods section, it will be helpful if they give some more details on the “microbiological confirmation”

While they state that the female gender has been associated with more intense pain perception, it is not clear why they present only the results from male gender in Tables 1 and 2.

Which journal?: Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of importance in its field

What next?: Accept for publication in BMC Medicine after minor essential revisions

Quality of written English: Acceptable
**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests.