Reviewer's report

Title: The effectiveness of high dose zinc acetate lozenges on various common cold symptoms: a meta-analysis

Version: 3  Date: 5 December 2014

Reviewer: Thomas Kötter

Reviewer's report:

The common cold and its (effective) treatment is a topic of great interest to family physicians, patients and the community. This article describes meta-analyses of studies on the effectiveness of high-dose zinc acetate lozenges on different common cold symptoms. As such, the article fills a gap in the literature, leads to conclusions directly relevant for daily practice and generates hypotheses worthy of study through future research.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1) Quality assessment of included studies provides an indication of whether the results of these studies are prone to bias. The authors neither report having applied a state-of-the-art quality assessment method nor do they report results of such a quality assessment. Stating that: “The trials were randomized, placebo-controlled and double-blind, and few dropouts occurred” (lines 160 et seq.) isn’t sufficient, not least in light of the clinical relevance and potential impact of the results. I recommend that the authors report the quality assessment method used and the results of the quality assessment in more detail (e.g., a separate table).

- Minor Essential Revisions

1) In order to enable the reader to get an instant impression of the data analysed in the meta-analyses, it would be useful to report the total number of patients receiving zinc acetate lozenges or placebo in the first paragraph of the results section.

- Discretionary Revisions

1) I would recommend moving the first paragraph of the discussion section either to the introduction or further towards the beginning of the article. In order to enhance the structure of the discussion section, the authors should give a summary of the main results at the beginning of the section.

2) The most recent update search of clinical trial registries was conducted in January, 2013. Since the effectiveness of zinc on common cold symptoms is a topic of great interest, it is not unlikely that newer, as yet unpublished, studies than those already included do exist. Please state whether you did an update search of clinical trial registries and, if so, when you did it and what the results were.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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 that I have no competing interests