Reviewer’s report

Title: New foe treated with old guns - Role of steroids for the treatment of acute severe hepatitis E

Version: 3 Date: 3 June 2014

Reviewer: Joop Arends

Reviewer’s report:

This report is well written and tries to conclude that steroid therapy is an alternative therapy for acute liver failure (ALF) caused by HEV. This is a rare case of an immunocompetent patients with ALF with a primary diagnosis of toxic/medication induced hepatitis after which prednison was started. Despite initial negative HEV PCR and serology the authors tested again for HEV finding the diagnosis.

Minor Essential Revisions

- as discussed though not very extensively, this could also have been spontaneous clearance of HEV. I would like this point to be more clear, both from the title and the conclusion. Stating on one patients that in steroid therapy might be used in developing countries (other genotypes, other health care systems), is to strongly put.

- Why did the authors decide to do a second round of HEV testing? In the manuscript this is phrased as "we suspected acute HEV"; suspected based on what? And if there was such a strong suspicion why was ribavirin not started as well?

- Moreover, since the chain of events normally is that a patient with ALF presents at the hospital, you do diagnostic tests, and in the time awaiting results have to decide whether or not to treat a patient depending on the most likely diagnosis at the time. For this patient, the pathology report was toxic/medication induced. As clearly discussed, in ALF there is a sort of immunological phenomenon ongoing which responds well to steroids. So this case highlights in my view that starting prednison for ALF (without a diagnosis at the time) does not hamper (spontaneous or steroid induced) viral clearance of acute HEV infection.

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 that I have no competing interests