Reviewer's report

Title: Early Life Environment and Natural History of Inflammatory Bowel Diseases

Version: 3 Date: 29 October 2014

Reviewer: Sunny Hei Wong

Reviewer's report:

This study addresses an important question on the effect of early life exposure on the course of IBD. The study has a decent study design and methodology, and the statistical methods are valid. This paper is potentially publishable if the following questions are addressed.

Minor essential revisions as follows

1. The authors have included several factors like the age of diagnosis, disease location and perianal involvement as potential confounding factors. Have they included other known adverse factors, such as steroid use at first presentation, as a potential confounding factor?

2. The chance of surgery is affected by the duration of disease. This is very major confounding factor. While the authors have rightly put that in the regression model, can they provide more details on this factor? What are the mean durations and the SD of the two groups (surgery vs no surgery), and are there significant differences between the groups?

3. The first letter of the italicized bacteria names should be capitalized in lines 208-209.

4. Please provide evidence or reference for the statement "early life exposure may have greater and more sustained effects on the gut microbiome than exposures later on in adult life" (line 226-227)

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests