Reviewer's report

Title: A Retrospective Review of a Tertiary Hospital's Isolation and De-isolation Policy for Suspected Pulmonary Tuberculosis

Version: 2 Date: 11 November 2013

Reviewer: Srinath Satyanarayana

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript is of relevance. There are several issues that the authors need to fix. First of all they must clearly state their research question and/or specific objectives. Without this it is very difficult to judge whether they have adopted appropriate methodology to answer their research question.

Introduction

1. 2nd Paragraph 1st Sentence: “Protocols for isolation…. disease”. Add reference to this statement.
2. 3rd paragraph: Who is “suspected for pulmonary TB” in your setting?
3. The research question/objectives mentioned at the end of the introduction is vague and broad. It says “We performed this retrospective study to evaluate our existing hospital protocol for isolation and de-isolation of suspected pulmonary TB cases”. This must be made more specific.

Methods

4. The methods section is written haphazardly. It will be easy to read and understand if the methods are organised into various subsections such as setting, study design (rationale for choosing this study design in comparison to other study designs), study population (inclusion and exclusion criteria), selection of study participants including sampling and sample size calculations (if applicable), study period, study variables (and its sources), study investigators, ethics approval, data management (data validation) and analysis plan (including what was done when the data was missing).
5. Describe what tests that are performed and in what sequence they are done for ruling out pulmonary TB as soon as the patient is admitted to the isolation ward? Are all tests mentioned in the first paragraph of the methods section done simultaneously or is there an algorithm? If an algorithm is available, then this may be provided in the form of a figure. This should also give information on what is done for patients whose sputum samples are positive or negative for Mycobacterium Tuberculosis. Are new WHO endorsed tests such as cartridge based Nucleic acid amplification tests (eg Xpert MTB-rif), which is fast, highly sensitive used in this setting or not?
6. The reviewer does not understand that out of 201 patients why only 121 patients’ data were analysed? This is perhaps linked to the study objectives or research question which at present is not clear and vague.
Results
7. General comment: The tables should stand alone and the percentages should add up to 100% (if they don’t add up, then some explanation has to be provided).
8. Demographics:
8.a. Age- only median is given; give range as well
8.b. Table 1:
8.b.i. The title of the table is incomplete, does not provide information on the total number of study participants.
8.b.ii. Some percentages are confusing; for example: residency n(%) =27 (22.3%) what does this mean and what happens to the other 77.7%?.
8.b.iii. Percentages under type of housing adds up to 101.1%, under occupation adds up to 103.8%..?
8. c. The information provided in the narrative and tables don’t match. For example 9.1% don’t live in a fixed abode as per the table whereas in the text it is mentioned as 10%.
9. The median duration of symptoms was two weeks (mean: 46 days, range: 1-365). What symptoms are they referring to? Is it all symptoms or a few symptoms and how good is the data collected here?
10. How have the costs been arrived at? What components does it contain? Is it only isolation bed charges or does it also include charges for human resource and other aspects? It appears that the calculation of costs is very superficial and does not carry much meaning.
11. The discussion and conclusion section is well written and addresses all the major issues. It may be require certain modifications based on the suggestions above.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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'