Reviewer's report

Title: How many preterm births in England are due to excision of the cervical transformation zone? Nested case control study

Version: 2  Date: 7 April 2015

Reviewer: Walter Prendiville

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for asking me to review this paper, which I have read and enjoyed. The paper is devoted to a highly topical and important subject in clinical practice and is worthy of publication in the journal. I would recommend acceptance and have just one comment which relates to the terminology used.

In the methods section (line 91) the authors describe three documented measurements which were entered into the study database …….."Pathology reports were entered into the study database by two trained individuals (AP and TP) to ensure measurements were entered in a standardised way, facilitating the identification of the length, width and depth of specimens".

In line 113 of the manuscript the authors define the depth of excision……….."Depth of excision was defined as the distance from the distal or external margin to the proximal or internal margin of the excised specimen".

In the plethora of papers relating excision dimensions to risk of preterm labour there is some confusion of nomenclature. Terms like height, depth and length are not clearly defined and mean different things in different publications. As a result of this the IFCPC included excised specimen dimensions in their updated nomenclature. The definition of depth in this study is actually length as defined in other papers, and most importantly in the IFCPC nomenclature of 2012.

In this excellent paper by Wuntakal and colleagues it would help readers understand the implications of excised specimen dimensions if these dimensions were clearly defined and consistent with the IFCPC nomenclature (Bornstein et al 2012). The authors should define both in the text and in an illustration precisely what is meant by depth, length and width and, ideally, should use terms consistent with the IFCPC nomenclature. Many of the individual measurements in the study database may not have used terms that are easily understood but as far as possible the terms length, thickness and circumference should be used as these are in the IFCPC nomenclature and are clearly understood. Three pictures may be helpful in clarifying what is meant. These are:

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests: 

no competing interests