Reviewer's report

Title: Surfactant Does Not Protect Preterm Infants From Early Deaths In Northeast Brazil

Version: 3 Date: 25 September 2014

Reviewer: Jose Luis L Diaz-Rossello

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   Yes

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   Yes

3. Are the data sound?
   Yes

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   Yes

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   No
   Conclusions are not based on adequate analysis and confounding factors have not been discussed.

   Comparison of any of the risk factors for neonatal death in VLBW infants should analyse subgroups for gestational age (each week) or weight (each 100g). Survivors are of higher weight and gestational age than non-survivors and this is a major confounding factor to analyse other factors like use of surfactant, antenatal steroids, etc.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   No
   The authors miss a major limitation as stated in 5

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   No

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   No
   There is no proof for their conclusion that surfactant has no impact on
neonatal survival.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

Analysis should be done by gestational age and birth weight.
Mortality rate and impact of each intervention is different for each week of gestational age or each 100g of birth weight, specially in the VLBW infants.

Level of interest
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Current national reports of vital statistics do not include data to understand the components of neonatal mortality. This article reports precious data, carefully collected, seldom reported, to have a more precise understanding neonatal mortality and the type of care currently available in a vast region of a country with higher neonatal than postneonatal infant mortality. This epidemiology characteristic of modern perinatal care increasingly frequent in middle and low-income countries, with universal access to hospital birth and specialized neonatal care, deserves more publications accounting for outcomes.

Statistical review
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Is it essential that this manuscript be seen by an expert statistician?
- No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician. The confounding factors should be raised to the statistician by the epidemiologists in the planning of the statistical analysis.

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' below.