Reviewer’s report

Title: Radiographic progression in early rheumatoid arthritis patients following initial combination versus step-up treat-to-target therapy in daily clinical practice: results from the DREAM registry

Version: 0 Date: 25 Sep 2017

Reviewer: Susanna Proudman

Reviewer’s report:

While well-written and utilising appropriate statistical analyses, the design of this study has significant short-comings.

It was not a randomised study even though a case-control design from two observational cohorts was used.

There were differences (acknowledged by the authors) in the era in which study was undertaken, the timing of assessment and dose adjustments, use of glucocorticoids, maximal MTX dose used and timing of TNF inhibitor use if needed.

The scorers of radiographs were not blinded to group. Were they authors on the manuscript or a third party?

Was the study adequately powered given the study design? Was it a retrospective design?

The introduction states "whether initial combination therapy and the subsequent shorter time to remission, as compared to initial step-up monotherapy, also results in better radiological outcomes has not yet been studied" yet it doesn't differ significantly from other studies using initial vs step up combination eg the BeSt study, raising questions about what this study adds to the literature.

What were the criteria for discontinuing DMARDs?

What was the difference in mean dose of steroids in each group?

Were there differences in the proportions of patients achieving remission in each group?

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.
No

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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