Reviewer’s report

Title: Points to consider in First recommendations for cardiovascular disease risk management in among patients with rheumatoid arthritis living in Sub-Saharan South Africa, an unequal large low to middle income country region

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Reviewer: Kim Lauper

Reviewer's report:

This study sought to create the first recommendations for cardiovascular disease management in patients with rheumatoid arthritis in Sub-Saharan Africa.

After an extensive systematic literature review, an expert panel formulated recommendations. While the intention is laudable, we have major concerns.

1) Title/authors
This study sought to create recommendations for Sub-saharan Africa. Our two main issues with that is that:
- According to the level of evidence, recommendations seems to be a strong word, as most of the evidence has been evaluated out of Africa. Only a few studies have been conducted in Africa. Something less strong such as "points to consider" would be more appropriate.
- All the African authors are from South Africa. This does not represent Sub-Saharan Africa but South Africa. Accordingly, the title should be in "South Africa", and not "Sub-Saharan Africa". South Africa is one of the richest countries in Africa, even if there is a great social equality in the country, it is not representative of the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa.

2) Methods
- The authors said that as the level of evidence ranged from 1 to 3 and that it was not considered to be necessary to apply the Delphi methods. This surprise us, as the level of evidence may be from 1 to 3 but does not necessarily apply to Sub-Saharan Africa. Only a few studies have been conducted there. In addition, all African studies cited in this article are all from South Africa, this is not representative from Sub-Saharan Africa. This should be more clearly mentioned in the results and discussion.
- Only 3 authors were involved in creating the recommendations, and they were discussed only after with the authors co-authors. This is really a major issue, as this may represent the view from the 3 authors and not necessarily from all the panel of experts and should be discussed as a limitation of the study.

3) Results
- We were surprised by the recommendations. Most of them are very similar to recommendations from non African high income countries/regions. When it is not the case, it calls for even more action, such as carotid/femoral ultrasound, or more statin prescription and in does not discuss very intensely the fact that
  - One of the most important factors in controlling cardiovascular disease in RA patients is the control of the disease activity. And this is the main issues in Sub-Saharan
Africa. It is very difficult to access biotherapy, and thus to control disease activity in patients that do not respond to conventional therapy. One of the main problems in Africa is the unequal access to care.

Such exams as carotid/femoral ultrasound may not be easily accessible.

Systematic prescription of treatment such as statins in patients with RA seems to be a bit illusory, in a context where the patient may pay for their medication alone.

We think that this study should discuss more in details the evidence behind the recommendations. For each recommendation, was there studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa? If yes, is only South Africa?

In addition, it should discuss in details the problem of unequal access to care, and what to propose where there is difficulty to access basic care.

If there are not enough evidence, then there are not enough evidence, and we do not believe that studies conducted in high income countries can just be easily applied to Sub-Saharan Africa.

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.

Yes

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

No

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I am able to assess the statistics

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