

Reviewer's report

Title: Head-to head comparisons- too many too early? A historical systematic review of antibiotic trials for treating mild to moderate COPD exacerbations

Version: 1 **Date:** 30 April 2008

Reviewer: Phillipa Poole

Reviewer's report:

This is an interstign study wiht novel methodology. It challenges dogma in the area of antibiotic treatment of exacerbations of COPD, and will hopefully promote better study design in this area in the future.

The main concern is that authors draw very strong conclusions that pragmatic trials are not indicated on the evidence from placebo controlled trials, yet most of the data on which they base this assertion is in mild to moderate COPD. This is at odds with the findings of the Cochrance review (Ram FSF, Rodriguez-Roisin R, Granados-Navarrete A, Garcia-Aymerich J, Barnes NC. Antibiotics for exacerbations of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2006, Issue 2. Art. No.: CD004403. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004403.pub2) that found a reduction in death and treatment failure in those moderate to severe exacerbations treated with antibiotics compared with those on placebo. This point should be discussed further, least the reader conclude antibiotics have no place in treating infective exacerbations.

Might define 'pragmatic' in the abstract - not a term I have heard used before

References journal formatting needs checking - e.g JAMA not Jama,

numbers 34'000 should be 34,000?

Some English a little hard to understand and could do with copyediting e.g.

- page 6 proof of principle effectiveness should be either proof of principle or proof of effectiveness?

- p 6 accuracy not accurateness

sentences very long in places

Which journal?: Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of importance in its field

What next?: Accept for publication in BMC Medicine after minor essential revisions

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:

No competing interests