Reviewer’s report

Title: Prevalence and risk factors of hepatitis B and C virus infections among the general population and blood donors in Morocco

Version: 2 Date: 19 September 2012

Reviewer: Manal H El-Sayed

Reviewer’s report:

The study by Beha and co-authors is important as there are few studies reporting the prevalence of HBV and HCV in Morocco.

There are some concerns and queries regarding the manuscript:

Major Comments:

1. In the methodology section, the authors should highlight the sample size calculation in view of the previously known prevalence rates.

2. Eligibility criteria for recruitment are not clear for the general population. The authors should also state the numbers recruited from various centers and their distribution. Where patients consecutively or randomly recruited for the purpose of this study? Where questionnaires and training standardized for all participating centers?

3. It is also not clear whether blood donors were consecutively enrolled.

4. In the results section, the allocation of samples for studied tests should be clarified; 41269 samples were tested for anti-HCV and 23578 for HBsAg. The sample size is different and the authors don’t explain why some samples were tested for HCV and others for HBV. How many samples were tested for both HBV and HCV?

5. The age range is quite diverse in the general population and risk factors should be identified by age groups.

6. In the discussion section: The policies adopted by Morocco for blood screening should be elaborated. The authors are also advised to refer to previously published prevalence data (e.g. Infectious risks associated with blood exposure for traditional barbers and their customers in Morocco by Zahraoui-Mehadj et al, 2004; Prevalence of hepatitis C virus infection in Morocco and serological tests assessment of detection for the viremia prediction by Benouda et al, 2009; Hepatitis B prevalence and risk factors in Morocco by Sbai et al, 2011; Epidemiologic and virologic study of hepatitis C virus infections in Morocco by Cacoub et al, 2011…)

Minor Comments:

1. Typological, language and grammar mistakes should be reviewed and edited.

2. In the abstract, the studied population should be described. In the conclusion, alarmingly high prevalence doesn’t quite describe the findings of this study or
previous WHO prevalence data which place Morocco in the intermediate prevalence zone.

3. The background section should be shortened and focused on local and regional data.

4. The legend of the first table is incomplete and should state that the represented data belong to the general population.

5. In table 2, the percentage should have been calculated as mentioned in the upper horizontal axis.

6. Some references are fairly old and should be updated.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests