Reviewer's report

Title: Response rates to a mailed survey of representative cancer patients: incentive and length effects.

Version: 2 Date: 12 January 2010

Reviewer: Wendy Demark-Wahnefried

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions
1) The authors state that they were unable to obtain current health status data, this limitation is acknowledged; however, how confident is the team regarding marital status, especially when in this population many individuals are likely to become widows/widowers?
2) The authors list among their limitations the fact that little differences were observed with incentive amount. While it is speculated that this may be due to the fact that not enough separation existed (which could definitely be true), another reason is that cancer survivors tend to be more adherent, which is probably one of the reasons why the response rate was better than in most other populations. This should be included in the discussion.
3) The authors state that they are unable to determine reasons for refusal and list precancerous lesions as a potential reason; however, they should be able to discern refusal by stage 0 disease - this should be done and reported.
4) Rates for Hispanics and Whites are listed in the tables - why not other minorities? It would seem that, if anything, African-Americans comprise the largest minority population in PA, thus listing Hispanics seems odd.
5) Table 3 would benefit from supplying confidence intervals - the p-value is superficial, though if it is listed, it should be placed in the last column.

Minor Essential Revisions:
1) The authors stated in their letter that they changed the term "mail surveys" to "mailed surveys;" however this was not accomplished either in the abstract or text.
2) Suggest that the term "representative" is omitted from the title and the text until it can be defined.
3) The text should be reviewed by a scientific writer and the tables reformatted so they are of the quality typically seen for scientific publications.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'