Reviewer's report

Title: Meta-analysis of radiofrequency ablation versus hepatic resection for hepatocellular carcinoma

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Reviewer: Linda M Wong

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Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. The authors have studied 10 trials of liver resection vs RFA for hepatocellular cancer and performed a meta-analysis to try to determine which of the two therapies is superior. The problem and the question posed by the authors are well defined however the inclusion and exclusion criteria are not so clear. Was there a tumor size criteria for inclusion or exclusion? Did this exclude any patient that may have been rescued by liver transplant for failure of the initial therapy? Were they all cirrhotics? Differences in viral hepatitis? Patients undergoing these two treatments may be rather heterogeneous which is why it is so difficult to conduct a randomized clinical trial.

2. The data is sound and they do mention the limitations in the discussion. However, could they expand more on the populations of the trials – in terms of age, tumor number, tumor size, Child–Pugh score etc. This appears to be on the supplemental table but this is not discussed in the results section or the discussion.

3. Although the meta-analysis suggests that there is no difference in the early survival at 1 and 3 years, there is a survival advantage at 5 yrs for hepatic resection. Is this because the liver resection patients were younger, had better liver function, were not cirrhotic, had smaller tumors or something else? It’s not clear that a meta-analysis would be able to sort this out, but they should at least comment on this.

4. The title and abstract seem to convey what has been found and the writing is acceptable, but perhaps they need to say that this is a meta-analysis of RFA vs HR for small HCC, if that is their inclusion criteria otherwise the reader is just not sure what this study covers.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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