Reviewer’s report

Title: Laparoscopy-assisted posterior low anterior resection of rectal cancer

Version: 3 Date: 10 June 2014

Reviewer: Aneel Bhangu

Reviewer’s report:

The authors should be congratulated for reporting their technique in a challenging group of patients. My suggestions are to improve clarity for the generalist reader, as this is a technique paper for the super-specialised pelvic surgeon.

Minor compulsory changes

Introduction – is long and rambling. The authors need to get to their point much faster, and how they will address current controversies.

Methods

Selection bias – the authors do make clear their selection of patients for this specific procedure. The following information is needed:

1. are these consecutive patients

2. how many patients underwent surgery for rectal cancer in total over the corresponding period. Also, what did these patients receive surgically? (i.e. open v lap assisted v the 13 in this report).

The authors start presenting results in the method – e.g. height data

Are the complication results to 30 days, or beyond? Were all patients actively followed up or was this a notes review?

Please can the authors more definitely explain what they mean by ‘posterior approach’, for the non-expert reader. This is important to differentiate whether they are progressing knowledge based on laparoscopic assisted surgery with a Pfannenstiel (which they are, through a laparoscopic TME completed by a perineal incision [?]). The single sentence explaining it can be expanded upon in the introduction -this is the crux of the paper.

Statistical analysis – this should be more detailed so that readers

Discussion

APPEAR - “This surgery was easy to perform” – this use of language is inappropriate. I don’t think this is what the APPEAR authors were trying to say.

The discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study is appropriate.
General comments

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   Yes - see comments on intro

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   Need some clarification

3. Are the data sound?
   Yes - case series

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   yes

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   yes

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   NA

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   yes

9. Is the writing acceptable?
   Mostly

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

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