Reviewer's report

Title: Expense and Benefit of Neoadjuvant Treatment in Squamous Cell Carcinoma of the Esophagus

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Reviewer: Dr F Farinati

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until I see revised version

The paper addresses the issue of the clinical benefit of neoadjuvant chemo and chemoradiotherapy in a neoadjuvant setting in epidermoid carcinoma of the esophagus and of the related costs. The paper is potentially of interest, particularly with respect to costs, but there are several points that need reevaluation before the paper is accepted.

Major comments

The paper is retrospective, this being a bias, and compares 170 patients not undergoing neoadjuvant treatment (NT) to only 33 doing so. Apart from this point that cannot be resolved, the article is quite obscure with respect to the number of patients undergoing each type of treatment, not included in the study or to their fate:

a) how many are the patients who were not suitable for esophagectomy?
b) how many were treated only with chemotherapy and how many with chemoradiation (this is not stated in the patients and methods section)?
c) Which were the causes of death?

The two series of patients were not comparable in terms of TNM staging and tumor site. If this, on the one hand, makes the results even more interesting, it also introduces a serious bias in the evaluation of the data. The point should be further discussed.

The sentence "to the best of our knowledge chemotherapy .... caused neither major morbidity and mortality (Page 2 of the Results section). In a paper specifically addressing the point of the cost/effectiveness of chemotherapy in SCCE, toxicity should be described.

It is actually not true that there are no prospective randomized trials on the point (see Ancona et al, Cancer 2001).

Minor comments

English needs minor revision
Competing interests:

None declared.