Reviewer's report

Title: Local and distant recurrences in rectal cancer patients are predicted by the nonspecific immune response; specific immune response has only a systemic effect

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Reviewer: Dr Richard Strawson Stubbs

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

Advice on publication: Accept without revision

The authors are to be commended for this excellent and careful study of a large group of patients with rectal cancer.

Their report is a well written one, which seeks to unravel some of the intricacies of the immune response to rectal cancer. It will stimulate thinking and be of considerable interest to those researchers and clinicians who seek to harness the forces of the immune system for the benefit of cancer patients.

It alerts us to the potential importance/relevance of both the specific and the non-specific immune responses to cancer. This may be of considerable importance to the development of current cancer vaccine programmes which in general are seeking to evoke specific immune responses through priming of CTL with dendritic cells. There is good and growing evidence that non-specific responses also need enhancement. The relevance of mast cells indicated by this study and that of others suggests there may well be a role for histamine and its various modifiers in this regard.

Competing interests:

None declared.