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:** Prof Jeremy Jass

**Level of interest:** A paper of considerable general medical or scientific interest

**Advice on publication:** Accept after revision, which I do not need to see

This is a well-written and informative study that adds to our knowledge of tumour immunity. It is based on a well characterised set of rectal cancers.

**Major points**

1. A distinction should be made between intratumoral cells and intraepithelial cells (for example tumor infiltrating lymphocytes or TILs). I think that the authors are refering to intratumoral cells found in stroma rather than intraepithelial cells. The latter (TILs) has turned out to be an important biomarker for MSI-H colorectal cancer (see Michael-Robinson et al., Gut 2001;48:360).

2. MSI-H cancers have a good prognosis, but the mechanism is not understood. Tumour immunity may be a factor. MSI-H cancers are not very frequent in the rectum. Therefore the prognostic significance of inflammatory cell infiltration is likely to be independent of MSI-H status in this study or rectal cancer. It is probably worth stating this.

**Minor points**

1. Change "were" to "was" in Results, local recurrence, line 4.

2. No need for apostrophe after Cox (several times in text an tables).

**Competing interests:**

None declared.