Reviewer's report

Title: Which factors influenced therapeutic decisions for elderly patients with oesophageal cancer?

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Reviewer: Ryan Merkow

Reviewer's report:

Tougeron and colleagues retrospectively examined their experience treating esophageal cancer in the elderly between 1994 and 2007. Essentially this report is a description of how elderly patients were managed, and their outcomes, at a single institution. They also attempted to describe factors that were associated with these treatment decisions. Although this report does not really contribute substantial new information on the subject, it is a well-organized report in this important population of elderly esophageal cancer patients.

Major Issues:

1) The background and objectives of this study need to be more clearly stated and organized in the introduction. I think some of what is described can be included in the discussion, with more of a general background in the introduction paragraph.

2) On page 7, the statistical methods need to be described more clearly, perhaps in two separate paragraphs. One paragraph about the treatment strategy and the other the survival analysis.

3) The results are well organized and described. Perhaps this section could be more concise and the tables/figures sited.

4) In the results, you refer to “other patients”. This is confusing and this needs clarification and rewording.

5) On page 10 you state “no patient >80 benefited from surgery”. This is confusing in its current location. Please be more specific what you mean by this statement. Perhaps this should go in the outcomes section?

6) On page 13 you state “the treatment of elderly...”. This sentence needs clarification. It seems you are trying to state that although treatment of esophageal cancer may be associated with an appreciable morbidity, at 75 years old a considerable life expectancy remains.

7) I would like to see the conclusions organized better. It would be nice to see the headings used in the results section and so the discussion is organized similarly.

8) The limitations of the study deserve its own paragraph before the concluding paragraph. There are clearly numerous limitations including small sample size, single institution experience, data collection issues etc. Please address this.

9) In Table 5, Tumor stage appears to indicate that stage I pts had a higher...
hazards ratio compared to stage IV. This should be changed if incorrect.

Minor Issues

1) There are numerous grammar and spelling issues. They need to be fixed prior to publication.

2) The title may not be totally appropriate. This study retrospectively describes the patient, tumor and management characteristics of elderly patients with esophageal cancer, not what factors prospectively influenced therapeutic decisions. A more accurate title might be “Esophageal cancer in the Elderly: An analysis of the factors associated with treatment decisions and outcomes”. Or could just replace “influenced” with “associated”.

3) On page 5, the authors’ describe “carcinologic” treatment. At least for readers in the United States, this term is not part of the vernacular.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests