Reviewer’s report

Title: Detection of erbB2 copy number variations in plasma of patients with esophageal carcinoma.

Version: 1 Date: 29 November 2010

Reviewer: Brooke Fridley

Reviewer’s report:

This manuscript describes a study to determine if erbB2 copy number in serum predicts EC cancer and if copy number also is associated with survival. The findings are interesting in that CN is associated with EC and may be associated with survival (though the association is not as strong). The manuscript was well written and provides a being point for possible translation of findings to the clinic (after replication of the findings in a larger cohort of subjects).

Major:

• Why did you chose to use a CN < 2 and CN >= 2 (i.e., included normal in with gains in CN)? Did you look at if copy number was associated without the dichotomizing of the variable, or look at gain, lose and normal?
• How was the formula to determine CN determined? How did you handle non-integer results? Is this formula specific to this study (data set)?
• Need additional information on the subjects and survival variable. How was survival measured? From time from diagnosis or entry into the study? All subjects from one clinic? Was treatment the same for all subjects? Where all the subjects the same race (ie, any issue with possible population stratification)?

Minor:

• On page 9, please give standard error for slopes as needed to determine if the slopes are similar or not. Also, can you test that the slopes are different and report p-value.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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