Reviewer's report

Title: Cigarette, cigar and pipe smoking, passive smoke exposure, and risk of pancreatic cancer: a population-based study in the San Francisco Bay Area

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Reviewer: Jay Lubin

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Page 3, para 1, "Pancreatic cancer usually develops over many decades, with >70% of cases diagnosed after age 60.": This is an odd construction with two essentially non-connected elements. The proposition that pancreatic cancer may or may not develop over decades is largely unrelated to most cases being diagnosed at ages over 60 years.

Page 3, para 3, "We quantify the dose-response relationship between cigarette smoking and pancreatic cancer...": Given that the authors simply present ORs by categories of duration, cigs/day and pack-years, this statement seems to overstate their analysis in regards quantifying the "dose-response relationship". There is little analysis focused on characterization of the "dose-response".

Page 4, para 1, "There were 65 out-of-area pancreatic cancer patients identified through clinical records at the UCSF Medical Center who were eligible to participate because they met all study criteria other than their place of residence at the time of diagnosis.": It sound like these 65 patients were included as cases, even though they failed to meet study criteria (since they were not resident of the 6-county area at diagnosis). It seems to me that either design specifications are important and therefore investigators adhere to those specifications or the design specifications are not important. If the latter, then why establish any criteria at all if they may be ignored -- just use any cases. I would guess that controls for these subjects did reside in the study area. Thus, if study area is sufficiently important to include as part of the design and serve to limit study subjects, then these 65 should be omitted. The authors state that their study was population-based, and list it as a strength in the Discussion.

Page 7, line 8ff and Table 4: First, Table 4 does not clearly specify the referent category for ORs. Also, the authors make various claims for ORs by cessation within categories of duration, cigs/day and pack-years. The authors need to support these claims with p-values for homogeneity of ORs. Based on inspection and on the CIs, it appears that ORs by cessation are homogeneous across the various categories. Given the CIs, the ORs of 1.8 and 1.3 (and 1.8 and 1.4) are very likely statistically homogeneous.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.