Reviewer's report

Title: Diagnosis delay of breast cancer and its predictors: who is responsible?

Version: 1 Date: 5 July 2010

Reviewer: Lindsay Forbes

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper with many useful potential insights into delays in Malaysia that could be useful for policymakers.

Major compulsory revisions

Scientific

I believe this study to be cross-sectional with retrospective data collection rather than a historical cohort study (these need to show that they included a complete cohort of people at the time of diagnosis, and there is no evidence that this is the case).

It is not clear how the authors determined or categorised socioeconomic status.

I believe that the method of selecting women to be in the study in KL was systematic, not systematic random.

The authors need to show how they tested the validity of the instrument.

I do not believe that Cox proportional hazards ratio is the appropriate statistical method, as this was not a cohort study. I think the authors should have used logistic regression.

The authors do not define clearly how they defined a delayed diagnosis - >3 months? - nor do they clearly describe how they attributed "blame" for delays.

Table 5 is inadequate. It does not tell us what the variables in the model were, how many women were included in each model. It is insufficiently described in the results section.

Presentational

The standard of English throughout the paper is insufficient. I suggest finding a mother tongue English speaker to revise with your advice. It makes it difficult to judge the quality of the science.

There are results in the first part of the methods section - these would be better placed in the results section.

The Cox proportion hazards modelling is insufficiently described. The description suggests that the outcome variable was being diagnosed with breast cancer which is odd because of course all the study participants were diagnosed with breast cancer. The variables included in the model are insufficiently described. How were missing data dealt with? How did the authors decide which variables were to be included in the model? Were there interactions between variables? I
suggest your statistician revisit this section and improve it.  
Figure 1 is insufficiently labelled and described in the text. I am not sure how this way of presenting delay in consultation and to diagnosis adds to the descriptive data in the text.  
The structure of the discussion could be improved - starting with a succinct description of the key findings, then comparison with other studies, then discussion of strengths and weaknesses, then implications. The discussion reads as a rather general review of the topic and is too long and unfocussed. I don't think Table 6 or Table 7 helpful and I think the authors could summarise in the text in the section of the discussion. I suggest shortening the discussion significantly to focus on your key findings and reducing the number of references to the ones most relevant to the topic of this paper.  

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests  

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited  

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**  
I declare that I have no competing interests.