Reviewer's report

Title: Twist and Snai1 expression in pharyngeal squamous cell carcinoma stroma is related to cancer progression

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Reviewer: Joseph S Pagano

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Twist and snail are transcription factors that function in embryonic development and are expressed in several malignancies especially in metastatic tumors. Induction of their expression is accompanied by EMT and has been correlated with metastasis and progression of breast cancer and nasopharyngeal carcinoma (NPC). This and a previous paper by this group are the first papers on similar findings in SSC, a significant cause of death. It is also of interest because it adds new information to the contribution of EMT to tumor invasiveness. Of particular interest is the analysis of the expression of Snail and Twist in stromal cells. The results suggest that Twist expression in stroma contributes to invasiveness of tumor cells. The findings are credible and presented well. The paper is an important contribution to the relevant literature on EMT and the role of microenvironment in invasion and metastasis.

Comments:
1. Authors should provide information on which tumors were HPV-positive.
2. Fig 1 would be enhanced by showing larger fields at lower power as well as 400X.
3. Did authors examine any epithelial or mesenchymal markers in tumor tissue by IHC?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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 interest'