Reviewer's report

Title: Unknown Staged Cancer in the United States: A Population-Based Study

Version: 1 Date: 5 July 2011

Reviewer: Sara Karami

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript, “Unknown Staged Cancer in the United States: A Population-Based Study” is clear, well-written, and useful investigation of non-modifiable risk factors (i.e. sex, race) and un-staged cancers. The results of the paper add to and are consistent with other previously published work. The use of SEER data and design of the study was appropriate for this explorative study. The conclusions are supported by the results and not overstated. Well done.

Minor Comments:

(1) Be consistent with the use of U.S. and United States. Use the acronym U.S. after spelling the word out the first time in the introduction section of the manuscript.

(2) The last sentence of the second paragraph in the introduction is confusion. Please reword the last portion of the phrase ……are less likely to not have their tumor assigned a stage.

(3) Punctuation marks are misused a few times in the introduction section of the manuscript. Please edit this section more carefully. (For example: [4], at the end of sentence two of paragraph two in the introduction).

(4) In the Tables and Figures please change the word Breast to Female Breast.

(5) Reference the noted statement in the discussion: (Note that in the United States, only high risk individuals are recommended to pursue esophageal or stomach cancer screening).

Major Comments:

(1) In the methods section the author(s) states their data consists of 1,040,381 male and 1,011,355 female participants with newly diagnosed cancers. They continue to describe statistical methods and study results by race (white and black) even though they explain that SEER covers a wide diverse racial/ethnic population of the US (23% African American, 40% Hispanic, 42% American Indian…). Please clarify if the study population (1,040,381 male and 1,011,355 female) consisted of only black and white subjects or if they were mixed ethnically/racially. If the study population is mixed, please provide statistics (number) by race/ethnicity too.

(2) Referring back to the previous question, in the methods section when the authors are describing their variables, what constituted white versus black. Are
Asians considered white? What about Hispanics? The self-reporting and relying on medical records, may also be a limitation of SEER worth mentioning in the discussion section.

(3) In Table 1 please clarify what is meant by year (the rate difference for each cancer between 2000-2001 and 2006-2007) in the footnotes or by changing the variable name all together. Also please describe what year represents in the results section of the manuscript. Currently the author(s) states: A significant decrease in unknown staging occurs for each of the cancers, with….more detail is needed describing the decreasing rate over time.

(4) In the results section the author(s) states: A significant decrease in unknown staging occurs for each of the cancers, with the exception of malignancies associated with oral cavity and pharynx, melanoma of the skin and the thyroid, where no significant change occurred. However according to results provided in Table 1, the authors fails to describe the significant increase in rate for stomach cancer over time as well as the non-significant decrease in rate for cervical cancer over time. Lastly, blacks also had a higher rate of un-staged cancers of the kidney and renal pelvis compared to whites, which is not listed/noted in the results.

**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 interests