Author’s response to reviews

Title: Breast cancer stage at diagnosis and area-based socioeconomic status: A multicenter 10-year retrospective clinical epidemiological study in China

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Although socioeconomic status (SES) has been focused on as a key determinant of cancer stage at diagnosis in western countries, there has not yet been a systemic study on the relationship between SES and breast cancer stage in China. In this study, based on the Nation-wide Multicenter 10-year (1999-2008) Retrospective Clinical Epidemiological Study of Breast Cancer in China, we explored the effects of both area level factors, namely SES, and individual demographic characteristics on breast cancer stage at diagnosis. Our aims were to identify high risk areas and the most important and controllable regional and individual factors that influence cancer stage at diagnosis. We found that women in low SES areas are more likely to be diagnosed at a later breast cancer stage than are those in high SES areas, and education appears to be the most important individual demographic characteristic influencing breast cancer stage. To our knowledge, ours is the first study to tie SES to health status within a developing country. What’s more, the present study is the first geographically representative epidemiologic study of breast cancer in China. In the absence of any prior documentation, our findings on the demographic and pathologic characteristics of cases provide a picture of patient and tumor characteristics nationwide.