Reviewer’s report

Title: A validated survival score for patients with metastatic spinal cord compression from non-small cell lung cancer

Version: 2 Date: 11 June 2012

Reviewer: Andreas Leithner

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In the context of a personalized cancer therapy scores like the one proposed by Dirk Rades et al are of high interest for those deciding which treatment path to choose. Should patients with cord compression due to non-small lung cancer (NSCLC) metastases receive surgery, radiotherapy or palliative care only? Although I enjoyed reading the paper, I found several topics missing or unclear.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Based on the different authors’ affiliations one might assume that this was a multicenter study. Please state if single center or multicenter.

2. Timeframe: What was the timeframe of this study? If the study period was long (e.g. 20 years), did the authors see a difference in survival, e.g. due to a better systemic treatment?

3. Systemic treatment: How many patients did receive systemic treatment? Did it influence survival?

4. Patient selection: When I understand correctly, only patients with radiotherapy alone were included. Excluding the patients receiving surgery, however, would lead to a certain bias, as those patients with better prognosis might have been operated on? Furthermore, in my opinion, the decision whether to operate or not is still the main question in the treatment algorithm.

5. Adding to this, the authors should discuss the impact on NSCLC-metastases on different scores like Tomita, Tokuhashi (modified), and Bauer (modified). I support the authors’ idea to identify a better prognostic subgroup for NSCLC-metastases. Therefore please discuss the limitations of the other scoring-systems.

6. Survival: To enhance comparability to other studies, please provide median overall survival for the whole patient group and the subgroups. I propose to calculate the survival period from date of diagnosis of the spinal metastases (and of cord compression) to date of death or last follow-up, with a minimum follow-up of 12 months.

Minor Essential Revisions

7. In my pdf the methods section was at the end of the manuscript and missing in the abstract.

8. Figures: please provide exact description of the x- and y-axis.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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