Reviewer’s report

Title: Impact of modern chemotherapy on the survival of women presenting with de novo metastatic breast cancer

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Reviewer: Susanne Briest

Reviewer’s report:

Comments to the authors
Dear Authors,

In the study you are presenting you performed an analysis of 274 patients treated for de novo metastatic breast cancer during a period of 20 years (1985 – 2004). The aim of the study was to associate the use of novel systemic therapies with survival of patients with breast cancer. For this reason the patients were divided into 2 groups: treatment period between 1985 and 1994 as well as 1994 and 2004.

The fact that the survival of patients with de novo metastatic breast cancer has improved over the last 20 years is without doubt.

You state, that the contribution of conventional cytotoxic agents to the improvement of survival is minimal. We think, that such a small number of patients treated over such long period of time with supposingly so different regimens is not the way to prove the hypothesis. And: there are no data about radiation and surgery.

The correlation of bisphosphonates as a therapy with a better survival seems to be biased by the fact, that not all patients with bone metastasis received the appropriate therapy. For analysis only patients who got the standard treatment should be compared. If i.e. 31 patients are HER2 positive and only 19 received therapy, no effect can be awaited; the same with bone metastases.

The paper is clearly laid out. All the key elements are present: abstract, introduction, materials and methods, statistical analysis, results, and conclusions. The title and abstract describe the content of the article. The introduction is clear. The authors describe the patient cohort and the results in a correct way. The discussion addresses the problems of the presented work.

The article does not seem to meet the question, which is the reason that we didn’t advise it for publication.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

There are no competing interests.