Reviewer's report

Title: Human Papillomavirus-associated oropharyngeal cancer: an observational study of diagnosis, prevalence and prognosis in a UK population

Version: 3 Date: 6 April 2013

Reviewer: Tsung-Lin Yang

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Major Compulsory Revisions

In this study, all cases were enrolled from 2001 to 2006. Because many blocks were retrieved from years ago, the quality of paraffin block is important for associated analysis. It may lead to a bias because the old blocks may be more difficult to be kept in good quality. In light of the drawbacks, the internal control to confirm the block quality is critical. In this study, HMBS gene was used for checking the DNA quality. Since no significant difference in survival was seen when HMBS negative cases were excluded from the analysis, the abstract, the results, and the conclusions should be re-written. The negative results of HMBS positive cases should be addressed and discussed more. Furthermore, only HMBS positive cases had good quality for analysis, and thus produced convincing results. It is unreasonable to combine HMBS positive and negative cases for subsequent analysis only because of the insignificant results of HMBS positive cases. The results and analyses based on HMBS positive cases are the most scientifically solid part of this study.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

nothing to declare