Reviewer's report

Title: Influence of gender and age on the survival of patients with nasopharyngeal carcinoma

Version: 3 Date: 4 February 2013

Reviewer: Megan Daly

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript describes a retrospective analysis of 299 patients treated definitively for nasopharyngeal carcinoma with IMRT. The authors evaluate the influence of gender and age on prognosis in this cohort of patients.

Discretionary revisions:
None

Minor Essential Revisions:
1) In the fourth paragraph of the results section, p values are missing from some of the comparisons.

2) The authors should consistently refer to the genders as either “male” and “female” or “men” and “women” rather than switching interchangeably between the two terms.

3) In the conclusions of the abstract it states that “gender and sex are strong independent prognostic factors”. I believe the authors intended to state that “gender and age are strong independent prognostic factors.”

4) In the results section it states that the genders were balanced with regards to characteristics including extracapsular extension. As these patients were treated non-operatively, how was extracapsular extension identified? Is this radiographic extracapsular extension?

5) The paper should be edited for grammar prior to publication.

Major Compulsory Revisions:
1) Several p-values throughout the paper are stated as “0.000”. This should instead be stated as “p<0.001” as the likelihood of these differences being by chance is not zero.

2) The radiotherapy section of the materials and methods is confusing. The PTV1 is described as the target encompassing the gross disease with margin. Then, however, it states that the GTV was prescribed 70 Gy and the PTV1 received 66 Gy. This should be clarified, as prescribing a different dose to the GTV and the PTV1 is unusual. The sentence describing an anterior cervical photon field is also confusion and should be clarified.
3) In the discussion section, the statement “because older patients always worse performance status and more co-morbidity” should be qualified and clarified, or removed. It is a broad over-generalization to state that older patients will always have a worse performance status and more comorbidities.

4) The statement in the discussion section that “androgens may play an important role” should be expanded on, discussed, and references should be provided.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**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