Author's response to reviews

Title: Cancer survivors in Switzerland: a rapidly growing population to care for

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Version: 2 Date: 13 May 2013

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity of reviewing our manuscript and incorporating the valuable comments of the reviewers. These changes have greatly improved the manuscript.

Regarding your point on ethical approval: In this study we used epidemiological databases with routinely collected, anonymized data as part of national and cantonal programs. There was no primary data collection during this project nor the possibility to identify or re-contact any individuals. According to the ethical standards and guidelines in place, therefore, formal ethical approval was not required.

We hope this sufficiently answers your question. Please don’t hesitate to contact us for additional information.

With best regards,

Christian Herrmann
Reviewer's report

Title: Cancer survivors in Switzerland: a rapidly growing population to care for

Version: 1 Date: 28 March 2013

Reviewer: roberta de angelis

Reviewer's report:

Minor essential revisions

1. A major limitation/assumption of the study is that prevalence estimation at the national level is based on just 4 registries covering a limited portion of the national population (26%).

A way to test the representativeness of these local data is to compare the expected mortality rates derived from the Piamod fit of incidence data against the observed national rates from Swiss Official Statistics. This comparison is cited at the end of the section on Statistical Methods, but there is no description of the corresponding results (SSQ differences). The authors could describe the results of this validation and thus provide the readers with more solid justifications to the statement at the end of the Discussion section “We are therefore confident that estimates reflect the true situation…”

   We described that point as suggested by the reviewer in more detail in the Methods section (page 6 line21 – page 7 line 4) and discussion (page 12 lines 18-22).

2. Discussion, penultimate paragraph

Could the authors rephrase the sentence “We used mortality data, available in …thus provide for missing incidence data”? It seems out of the context and not very clear

   We rephrased the sentence taking also point 1 of the reviewer into account (page 12 lines 18-22).

Discretionary revisions

1. Time projections to 2020 were done with the Piamod method. The join-point analysis was then applied to the estimated prevalence rates 1990-2020 to identify points of change, type of trend and APC values. The results are given just for all cancers combined. The authors could consider the possibility to give results on projections to 2020 also for the specific cancer sites in exam

   We added a table as supplementary information with site and sex specific forecasts of cancer prevalence (page 8 lines 21-25, page 13 section “Additional material”, Additional file 1).

Minor issues not for publication

1. Discussion, fourth paragraph

According to our estimates, the biggest group …those living with MORE than 5 years

   We rephrased that sentence. (page 10 lines 21+ 22)
2. Discussion, second paragraph

The reference year for the prevalence values in other countries should be reported, so as to allow the reader to understand if time periods are comparable (differences of few years can have a high impact on prevalence estimates).

We included the reference year and updated the values with newly available information from the NORDCAN website (page 9 lines 13-14+16). We accordingly updated the reference for the Nordcan-website [23] to version 5.3 (25.04.2013) (page 16 line 9).

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.
Reviewer's report

Title: Cancer survivors in Switzerland: a rapidly growing population to care for

Version: 1 Date: 22 April 2013

Reviewer: Yuri Ito

Reviewer's report:

This study provided very important statistics for cancer survivors, care providers, and policy makers. Authors stated clearly the motivation of the study and analysed using appropriate statistical methods.

Discretionary Revisions

1) Tables and figures of results were limited. The projected number of cancer survivors by sex, age and sites was also very important and useful results. Please add these results as tables if possible. If your space (number of tables) were limited, please add them in additional data (Web appendix).

   We added a table as supplementary information with site and sex specific forecasts of cancer prevalence (page 8 lines 21-25, page 13 section “Additional material”, Additional file 1).

2) It seems that authors used the APC from the trends in all combined sites of prevalence rates to project future prevalence. Have you tried to estimate the projection of prevalence based on trends in sex-, age- or site-specific prevalence? If possible, please clarify the difference between the results based on trends in all combined data and by sex, age and sites of cancer, because the difference of trends by site may affect to total prevalence.

   Following the reviewers advice, in order to give the reader a better idea about the influence of each major cancer site on total prevalence projection, we added a table as supplementary information with site and sex specific forecasts of cancer prevalence (page 8 lines 21-25, page 13 section “Additional material”, Additional file 1) and rephrased two sentences in the discussion (page 10 lines 17-18).

   Please note that the projection method was using the PIAMOD prediction approach (cf. Methods section), projecting incidence with a linear period drift based on the period 2007 to 2010 and pertaining age and cohort effect. Survival and mortality for all competing causes are assumed to be constant at 2010 level. Rates were calculated from the projected numbers using population forecast from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. Projection using the APC from trends were used only to verify the aforementioned approach.

Minor Essential Revisions

1) There are several methods to estimate and project prevalence. Please explain the reason why authors chose the PIAMOD (for prevalence) and Joinpoint model, citing some papers using other approaches.

   We expanded the discussion section accordingly (page 9 line 20 – page 10 line 2).
Major Compulsory Revisions

None

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:** I declare that I have no competing interests.