Reviewer's report

Title: Delay factors in the diagnosis and treatment of symptomatic colorectal cancer

Version: 1 Date: 14 June 2012

Reviewer: Peter Murchie

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for asking me to review this very well written paper which presents a detailed analysis of the factors associated with colorectal cancer diagnosis in different regions of Spain. The paper has some methodological weaknesses, but these are acknowledged and are common to all similar research. A key strength of the current paper is the attempt to address this by collecting data from patients and from medical records.

Major Compulsory Revisions

I have very few major concerns.

1. I would like to see a section in the discussion explicitly discussing the current results in the context of international literature.

2. Could the authors make a comment on why they did not explore rurality, and any views on what this might add if the issue were explored in Spain.

3. I would like to see a fuller explanation of the use of "non-classical" survival analysis - i.e. what is the justification for not censoring data - within the methods section.

4. Could the authors please justify the exclusion of tumours diagnosed in private hospitals - I don't understand the rationale for this.

Minor Essential Revisions.

1. The authors seem to fluctuate between family physician and general practitioner throughout the manuscript. Could they be consistent please?

2. Page 8 - there is a typo "U-Mann Whitney" should be "Mann Whitney-U."

3. Page 11 - there is a typo in the second sentence of the second paragraph "general practitioner" should be "general practitioners"

4. Could the authors define "abdominal occlusion." Is this abdominal obstruction - if so that would be the more usual term.

Discretionary revisions

1. The discussion is lengthy - I wonder if it could be pared back somewhat
2. My preference is for structured discussions - i) main findings; ii) context with other international literature, iii) strengths and limitations, iv) conclusions, implications and recommendations. Might the authors consider this?

3. Could the authors refer to general practitioners (GPs) in the abstract - not use family physicians - and then use the abbreviation GP throughout the manuscript. This would help readability.

4. I suspect some other reviewers or readers may expect reference to, and some limited discussion in context of, the recently published Aarhus statement. This is not a major concern for me, but something the authors might consider to make the paper as current as possible.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.