Reviewer's report

Title: Predictors of Recurrence Free Survival for Patients with Stage II and III Colon Cancer

Version: 1 Date: 27 December 2013

Reviewer: Dara Kavanagh

Reviewer's report:

Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

The question is very relevant and challenges with regard to recurrence after colon cancer surgery. Some established co

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

There is a very detailed description of the statistical methods used but the following clinical aspects need to be outlined

Yes. However, the authors should define more clearly what they mean exactly by a recurrence, local vs regional vs distant. How do they follow patients after colon cancer surgery. What is the interval for endoscopic follow-up and imaging bearing in mind the authors omit CEA staging from the follow-up.

Do the authors have a strict rule whereby all patients operated upon in the 2 centers are followed up at that center for the outlined followup period or do patients at remote sites have their surveillance done elsewhere and then provide copies of their surveillance for the databases at the authors institutions. Please expand on this process.

The authors outline that the standardised treatment delivered at the institutions ensures minimisation of heterogeneity in treatment. I fully agree with the authors regarding the benefit of this. Do the authors have a dedicated Multidisciplinary team meeting encompassing the clinician, surgeon, radiotherapist, medical oncologist, radiologist & pathologist which can ensure standardised treatment according to national practice parameters.

Were there any changes in chemotherapy treatments over the study period (1995-2013) which could account for differences in recurrences?

3. Are the data sound?

Yes

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Yes

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

Yes.
There are a number of unreferenced statements. I would suggest to the authors that they start the discussion by restating the findings of the study.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Yes. In fact the authors have over-emphasised the negative aspect of CEA. They include a reference form 1990 which alludes to an absence of cost effectiveness in utilising CEA. This can be omitted

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The conclusion of the abstract is a little disappointing and does not really leave a clear message. The conclusion of the main manuscript is well written. Are the authors referring to their provided data or the published literature with the abstract conclusion: ‘Current information is inadequate........?’

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Overall, the manuscript is well written with very high numbers studied and an acceptable duration of follow-up to capture disease recurrences.
The introduction is succinct, well written and outlines the established predictive markers of recurrence in a detailed manner.

Page 8 – there is a difference in lymph node yield between 1995-2001 and 2002 and 2007. Why do the authors think this has occured. Have the pathologist changed there means of detecting lymph nodes or has the surgery become more radical??
Why is there a significant difference in the differentiation of the tumor in the 2 study periods? Has the interpretation of this pathological entity changed or why do the authors account for this significant change?

Page 10 – paragraph 2. 3rd line – suggest “Most recurrences occured in the first 2.1 years after surgery.” The only prognostic factor identified was the T Stage”

Page 11. Is there a reference for the SEER data. The authors refer to other studies further down in the sam paragraph yet there is only a single reference. Second paragraph.

Line 4. Suggest rewriting as “ These findings differ from other studies demonstrating that certain ......”

Last line ‘no event for patients with well differentiated tumors’ please explain this statement.

Page 12 – line 2 – local, regional or distant recurrence.

Furthermore, a c-index of 0.56 indicates that we are just over a coin toss in predicting...Please rewrite this sentence
Page 13 – second last line of first paragraph – change T N to TNM

‘A limitation of our....’ rather than ‘A limitation in our..’

Please adhere to the instruction for authors as outlined for writing references. See example below.


Article within a journal supplement


In press article


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

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

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