Reviewer's report

Title: Microvascular invasion (MVI) is a prognostic predictor for small hepatocellular carcinoma

Version: 2
Date: 12 December 2013

Reviewer: Zhao-Chong Zeng

Reviewer's report:

Usually, patients with small HCC have better prognosis with lower recurrence and longer survival. However, some patients will present intrahepatic recurrence and/or distant metastases. We are really to know the impact factors to predict higher risk patients for treatment failure. This paper illustrated microvascular invasion is a poor prognostic factor for small HCC patients.

This manuscript is important for clinical oncologists, collected detail data, well-analysis and discussion. I have had some minor comments.

1. Title: I have a suggestion, the title should add "a poorer prognostic predictor".

2. Abstract, results: One hundred forty-seven (33.0%) patients had serum alfa-fetoprotein (AFP) level # 200ug/ml and 178 (63.8%) patients had post-operation serum AFP level # 20ug/ml. This sentence is difficult understant. Please see point 6.

3. Methods in page 3: from January 2006 to December 2008 in the authors’ institution were reviewed. Please tell readers how many HCC were treated in your hospital, and how many HCC patients received surgical resection. If you can provide this figures, readers will better understand the proportion of small HCC in the whole HCC group.

4. The authors should provide the information on pathologic characteristics of resected specimens, especially HCC relative immune history chemistry.

5. Follow-up: the last date of follow-up.

6. Results of Clinical pathological characteristic in page 4: Please add the patient number with AFP # 20 µg/L because the authors present the patient number who AFP # 20 µg/L for those with post-operation. It is easy to confuse that AFP failure is higher as point out in comment 2.

7. Figure 1. the authors can merge figure 1 a and b to be 1, i.e. the survival curves of OS and DFS in the same figure.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
Yes.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
Yes.

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.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Yes

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 Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?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

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes.

**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