Author's response to reviews

Title: Influence of pain severity on the quality of life in patients with head and neck cancer before antineoplastic therapy

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Vitoria (Brazil), October 30, 2013

Dear Editor,

We are submitting revised of the manuscript entitled “Influence of pain severity on the quality of life in patients with head and neck cancer before antineoplastic therapy” for publication in BMC Cancer.

The manuscript represents original material that has not been published and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. Conflict of interest statement was not declared. The manuscript has been read and approved by all the authors. The requirements for authorship have been met and each author believes that the manuscript represents honest work.

We are grateful for important contributions which certainly improved the quality of the article.

Sincerely yours

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Answers Reviewer A

Reviewer: Wojciech Leppert
Date: 30 October 2013

Paper - Title: Influence of pain severity on the quality of life in patients with head and neck cancer before antineoplastic therapy

1-Question or comment: Introduction. The aim of the study should be clearly presented; the Authors not only assessed pain severity and its impact on patients’ QoL but also explored QoL in patients with head and neck cancer with respect to pain severity and clinical stage of the primary tumor and lymph nodes involvement.

Response: As suggested in the introduction was included:
“Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess pain severity and its impact on the QoL in untreated patients with head and neck squamous cell carcinoma (HNSCC), and assess QoL of these patients with respect to pain severity, clinical stage of the primary tumor, and lymph nodes involvement.”

2-Question or comment: Methods. The methodology of the study is not clearly presented. There is no information when and how the patients were recruited; were the patients consecutive or not, were they outpatients or inpatients, was it a controlled or uncontrolled, retrospective or prospective study? There is no inclusion criteria provided, only exclusion criteria are listed. It is unclear how many of the 127
studied patients had no pain, mild or moderate to severe pain intensity. No information is provided how the instruments were filled in – by patients alone or with the assistance of the staff?

**Response:** As suggested was included:

In Methods, 1th paragraph:

“This study is prospective and controlled . . .”

“We interviewed 127 outpatients with primary head and neck squamous cell carcinoma consecutively who had undergone medical examinations in 2012 at the Santa Rita de Cassia Hospital-AFECC, Vitoria, ES, Brazil.”

“The cancer patients were distributed into groups with no pain (N = 52), mild pain (N = 47), and moderate to severe pain (N = 28). Inclusion criteria were patients with untreated HNSCC aged over 18 years and both gender.”

In Assessments, included: “The instruments were filled by patients with staff assistance.”

3-**Question or comment:** Results. Pain scores according to the Brief Pain Inventory should be presented. This is also the case for reliability analysis of all pain severity and pain interference items.

**Response:** The questions pointed have been described in the results section: “The mean score of item “average pain” during the last 24 hours in the BPI was 4.1. We separately calculated alpha coefficients for pain severity and pain interference. The internal consistency of the pain severity dimension was 0.82 and for the pain interference dimension was 0.92, indicating a satisfactory internal validity (>0.70).”

4-**Question or comment:** Discussion. It may start with the first sentence of Conclusions chapter and then focus on the interesting results obtained in this study. I would suggest to skipping or putting in a further part of the Discussion considerations about the type of pain in patients with head and neck cancer (“Normally, cancer pain is classified . . .”). A more in–depth analysis of study limitations could be useful for example a moderate study sample, patients’ recruitment from one center, study design etc.
Response: As suggested was included in Discussion the first sentence of Conclusions chapter.

In Discussion, was removed and put in a further part of the Discussion (4th paragraph) considerations about the type of pain in patients with head and neck cancer (“Normally, cancer pain is classified…”).

In 5th paragraph was included: “…the study was performed with moderate sample, and patients’ recruitment was from one center.”

5-Question or comment: Some minor comments: Whenever using names of the QoL questionnaires please put in front the EORTC. Assessments. With respect to the BPI – please add at the end of the instrument description (as bad as you can imagine/complete interference). The global QoL item of the EORTC QLQ C30 is a 7 – point scale. Table 1 – the sum of percentage often exceeds 100%, please check. The p – values provided in the legends to the astericks in Figures may be more exact

Response: The EORTC was put in front the names of the QoL questionnaires as suggested.

In Assessments was added “…(as bad as you can imagine/complete interference)” and “… the global health status / QoL scale item on a 7-point scale.”

In Table 1 the sum of percentage was modified for 100%.

The p-value was included in the Figures (1-4) with a value more exact, and removed of the legends.

Comments
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field. OK

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

Response: The text has been corrected and certified by “American Journal Experts”.

Comments
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician. OK
**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.

**All suggestions were accepted.**

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**Answers Reviewer B**

**Reviewer:** Maria GH Biazevic  
**Date:** 30 October 2013  
**Title:** Influence of pain severity on the quality of life in patients with head and neck cancer before antineoplastic therapy

**1-Question or comment:**

In Methods, I suggest that the period of time of data collection be included. Also, it should be clarified if there are validated versions of the instruments or if there were performed free translations.

**Response:** As suggested was included:

In methods, 1th paragraph: “We interviewed 127 outpatients with primary head and neck squamous cell carcinoma consecutively who had undergone medical examinations in 2012 at the Santa Rita de Cassia Hospital-AFECC, Vitoria, ES, Brazil.”

In methods, 2th and 3th paragraph: “…which was validated in the Brazilian population”  
As suggested in the methods was included the validated versions of the instruments (Ref. 12 and 15).

**2-Question or comment:**

In Results, 5th paragraph, 2nd line, remove "none, mild and moderate to severe", since this information is already part of Methods. In Results, last paragraph, the information with regard the "intensity of pain was not correlated with the tumor location...” can’t be seen in Figure 4 (it could be substituted by a Table that include the values). In the figures, I suggest that the name of the categories be
included.

**Response:** In Results, 5th paragraph, the “none, mild and moderate to severe” were removed.
In Results, last paragraph, the information "intensity of pain was not correlated with the tumor location..." is related to figure 3, not figure 4.

**Comments**

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable. **OK**

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

**Response:** Statistical analysis was reviewed and there is no change to be made.

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

**All suggestions were accepted.**