Reviewer's report

Title: Neoadjuvant chemotherapy in breast cancer significantly reduces number of yielded lymph nodes by axillary staging.

Version: 1 Date: 7 October 2013

Reviewer: Suzanne Coopey

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Minor Essential Revisions:
1. Title: would change “axillary staging” to “axillary dissection” since staging could simply mean sentinel node biopsy.
2. Do you routinely evaluate the axilla prior to initiation of chemotherapy with either sentinel node biopsy or FNA/core biopsy? Please state in methods as this could affect your positive lymph node rate in the primary chemotherapy group.

Discretionary Revisions:
1. Results section, 2nd paragraph, 1st sentence—would change “significant” to “significantly”
2. Results section, 2nd paragraph—the term “primary neoadjuvant chemotherapy” seems redundant since neoadjuvant chemotherapy implies before surgery. Would suggest changing to primary chemotherapy or just neoadjuvant chemotherapy.
3. Table 1:
--How did you determine tumor size in the PCG? Was this based on imaging? Perhaps include an explanation in Methods section.
--Could you give age ranges and tumor size ranges?
--For things like estrogen receptor, progesterone receptor, and Her2/neu receptors, I don’t think you need to include rows for both positive and negative. Positive would be sufficient.
--Was presence of LVI based on surgical resection specimen or core biopsy? It would probably be more accurate for the PCG if you used the core biopsy prior to chemo.
--Could you include what proportion of patients in each group took hormonal therapy, had radiation after breast conservation, and had post-mastectomy radiation? Since you later discuss recurrence rates.
4. Discussion, 1st paragraph—I would remove the first 2 sentences. The first sentence is confusing.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
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