Reviewer's report

Title: Causes of death in patients with extranodal cancer of unknown primary: searching for etiological clues

Version: 2  Date: 26 March 2014

Reviewer: paul shaw

Reviewer's report:

I think there needs to be a revision to address concerns regarding whether these patients primary cancers became known before death by investigation. If so then are they CUP patients? How can death certificates be issued suggesting a primary site unless further information becomes available?

What was this information's brew and does it challenge whether these patients were CUP patients? How many had autopsies to confirm primary site; was this the means of issuing a correct primary cause if death?

Compulsory revision
Accept if addressed appropriately
Limited in current form

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
Yes - although the abstract could be made more clear.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
Yes - however, were all data available, were any patients not included?

3. Are the data sound?
See above - database sounds good.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
I believe so but not aware of editorial standards for BMC

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
To an extent. I would like further information as I believe this must have become available for the death certificates to have been written to reflect a primary site. My criticism, therefore is that these patients were not true CUP patients, but metastatic malignancies of unknown primary at presentation, and in whom the primary cancer was revealed. Please read NICE guidance regarding definitions (CG104). This paper may therefore not truly reflect CUP but MMUP.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Please see 5.
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

I THINK SO

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

No really - I am not sure that any etiological clues have been found, rather, the primary has been found. Do we know the aetiology of CUP from this paper? not in my view. Also there are spelling mistakes in the title.

9. Is the writing acceptable?

Yes - there are some spelling errors (eg. come rather than some)