Author's response to reviews

Title: The JACS prospective cohort study of newly diagnosed women with breast cancer investigating joint and muscle pain, aches, and stiffness: pain and quality of life at baseline

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Response to reviewers

Title: The JACS prospective cohort study of newly diagnosed women with breast cancer investigating joint and muscle pain, aches, and stiffness: pain and quality of life at baseline

Version: Date: 30 December 2013

Thank you to the reviewers and for giving us the opportunity to revise our manuscript. We have made substantial changes to the document to tighten it up in response to the reviewers’ comments. Please see please responses to individual points.

Reviewer: Diana Greenfield

Title & Abstract
The abstract accurately conveys what has been found. There are no major discrepancies between the abstract and the remainder of the manuscript. However, the methods section teases the reader into thinking they will be receiving the results of the prospective study. It would be clearer if the authors introduce the intention to present the baseline data sooner and provide a rationale for this decision, (for the latter if not here then in the background).

We have altered the title to more clearly reflect the intention of the paper and have changed the wording throughout.

Results and discussion
Unusually, the results and discussion sections are presented together. However these are presented logically and are well supported by clear Tables and Figures. The data appear sound.
There is no information provided about the severity of the musculoskeletal pain experienced by 69% of the cohort at baseline.

We have separated the results and the discussion.
We have reported severity of pain using the BPI and reported this in table 4. We have made this clearer in the text.

The acronym JAPAMS is used but not defined ? a typo. The conclusions are well-balanced and are supported by the data.

We have removed this acronym as part of our rewrite.

Reviewer's report:

Reviewer: Ali Montazeri

Reviewer's report:
Thank you for giving me an opportunity to read and review an interesting
manuscript. In general the paper reports on an important topic that affects quality of life in women with breast cancer and thus merits publication. However there are a number of shortcomings with this manuscript that should be solved before its publications. I highlight some as follows:

1. General statements such as 'Breast cancer affects one in eight women' should be avoided or should be indicate where.

   We have changed statements of this kind.

2. The authors only present the baseline data. One expects at least they include baseline and three months follow-up data.

   There are some important aspects of the baseline data that we wanted to draw attention to prior to bringing in the three month data for this study. For example that joint or muscle pain, aches or stiffness are very common problems in this group of women even before they commence any adjuvant therapies and that pain of this kind has a significant negative association with quality of life. There is no published data on baseline pain in this population so this is an important piece of information. The three month follow up for this group is likely to be affected by any adjuvant therapy that the women have received which is a different topic and will need to be fully explored in further publications.

3. Figures for sample are confusing. This should be corrected. For instance in the abstract the authors report 543 patients (28%), in the Figure 1 they report 795 eligible patients while the sum is 796 (225+ 116+ 455). Most importantly they report 455 as 57%.

   The figures have been corrected and further explanation about the lack of screening information from two of the recruiting hospitals has been added.

4. The Results should be reported separately from the Discussion. At present it is difficult to follow the manuscript.

   The results and discussion have been split as recommended.

5. A section on limitation should be added to the Discussion.

   We have included a section on limitations in the discussion

6. The authors should discuss the findings more broadly in terms of geographic area. Perhaps looking at the literature in some other parts of the world might help to have a better understanding on the topic. For instance the authors might wish to consult the following literature:
   - Depression and quality of life in cancer patients with and without pain: the role
of pain beliefs. BMC Cancer 2008; 8: 177.
- Factors predicting the use of complementary and alternative therapies among cancer patients in Iran. European Journal of Cancer Care 2007; 16: 144-149.

This paper is not about quality of life or about the use of complementary therapy, so to avoid confusion we have removed reference to these. The paper is about joint pain and we have focused on this.

7. The sub-scales for the SF-36 reads as follows and these should be corrected both in the text and in the Tables:
Physical functioning, Role physical, Role emotional, Bodily pain, General health, Vitality, Social functioning, and Mental health.

Thank you for this comment. We have corrected this.

8. The Conclusion in the text goes beyond the findings and in fact starts to discuss again on the topic, even giving references. The references should be removed and the text should be revised.
Additional comments with references moved to the discussion and conclusion tightened.

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'.