Reviewer’s report

Title: TACE performed in patients with single nodule of hepatocellular carcinoma

Version: 2  Date: 23 April 2014

Reviewer: Justin Pryce McWilliams

Reviewer’s report:

Dear authors,

Congratulations on an interesting study of TACE in solitary HCC.

My comments (all are minor essential revisions except some discretionary revisions as noted):

ABSTRACT

1. First sentence of Background is unclear and poorly worded. “Patients with single hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) are usually submitted to transarterial chemoembolization (TACE) even if TACE is not the first expected treatment in that patients.” I would disagree with this statement. Patients with single HCC are very often treated with surgery, OLT or ablative rather than TACE. Would change wording to “Patients with solitary hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) usually undergo transarterial chemoembolization (TACE) if they are not candidates for curative surgical or ablative therapy.”

2. 2nd sentence: “The primary aim” not “Aim”. Also, “submitted” is not the ideal verb for TACE. Prefer “undergo” (present tense) or “underwent” (past tense). Please make this change throughout the manuscript. In this sentence: “The primary aim of the study was to assess the overall survival and clinical determinants of survival in patients with single HCC who underwent TACE.”

3. Methods sentence: The outcomes… were retrospectively…

4. Results, 3rd sentence: … 93 (63%) had a MELD increase…

5. Results, 5th sentence: unclear regarding “mild impairment of PS had some but minor impact on prognosis”- please clarify in exact terms- was this statistically significant? What was the exact magnitude? Reword for clarity.

BACKGROUND

6. 3rd sentence: remove “many”

PATIENTS AND METHODS

7. Last sentence of “patient population”: … as the cohort for the study

8. TACE protocol and technical procedure, 3rd paragraph: “Very few patients were submitted to TACE despite moderate liver dysfunction in the perspective of transplantation.” This sentence is unclear, I don’t understand what you mean. Please re-word for clarity.
9. TACE protocol and technical procedure, last paragraph, 2nd sentence: “separated by” not “performed at”

DISCUSSION

10. 2nd sentence: remove “many”

11. 2nd paragraph, 2nd to last sentence: “BCLC” not “BLCL”

12. It may be worth briefly explaining the “stage migration” concept since many readers will not be familiar with this term. A single sentence explaining the concept would suffice.

13. 3rd paragraph, last sentence: I do not believe you have the evidence to make this claim. Your study suggested that worsening of hepatic function after TACE is a negative prognostic factor, I agree; but I disagree that they should be switched to a different treatment or no treatment based on this alone, since there is no evidence that a different treatment or no treatment would improve their survival compared to repeat TACE. Please change this sentence accordingly.

14. 4th paragraph: “… patients with bland thrombosis are candidates for TACE… and a selective approach is feasible”

15. 5th paragraph. As you state, I believe that BCLC intends that performance status be used for cancer-related symptoms; it seems that you included performance status for any reason to allocate patients into BCLC stage C or D, but it should really only be if the reduced performance status is due to cancer symptoms. See your reference #1, J Hepatology, page 921, first column, which states: “Advanced HCC (BCLC stage C): Patients with cancer related-symptoms (symptomatic tumors, ECOG 1-2), macrovascular invasion… etc”. Since you yourself state that the PS1 patients were very unlikely to have PS1 related to cancer symptoms, perhaps these patients should not have been considered PS1 for the purposes of BCLC classification. You seem to agree with this based on your statements; a re-analysis of the data with these patients re-classified into BCLC A or B would be interesting though not required – up to the authors.

16. 5th paragraph, last sentence is unclear, please re-word for clarity.

17. 6th paragraph, 3rd sentence: “those reporting” not “those reported evaluating”

18. 7th paragraph: I agree that the day 1 decline in liver function is interesting, but were these changes persistent? You make a statement that we should avoid overtreatment and detrimental effects on liver function, but was this actually shown in your study? That is, were the lab parameters still abnormal 1 month after treatment, and did patients who underwent multiple TACE treatment fare worse in regards to liver function compared to those who only underwent one treatment? These data would be interesting if available.

19. Last sentence “… in the treatment of HCC.”

TABLES

20. Table 1: “Within Milan criteria” not “Milan criteria within”. Also make this change in other tables.
21. Table 4: I'm quite surprised that the very small absolute difference in INR and MELD scores proved to be statistically significant, especially with the wide range of the scores... please double check to ensure accuracy.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

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