Reviewer's report

Title: Co-expression of putative stemness and epithelial-to-mesenchymal transition markers on single circulating tumour cells from patients with early and metastatic breast cancer

Version: 3 Date: 15 April 2014

Reviewer: Giorgio Stassi

Reviewer's report:

As I have reported in the prior round of review, the overall message contained in the manuscript is not innovative because the same concept has been abundantly demonstrated in several other studies over the last few years.

My replies to the rebuttal letter.

1. To be classified as a CTC, the cell should be positive for cytokeratin, negative for CD45, and positive for a nuclear staining. Although the methodology used for breast CTC isolation is based on the expression of epithelial markers, authors should show that the isolation procedure excludes hematopoietic cells.

2. Although authors are currently evaluating the potential of breast CTC to generate tumors in vivo, they could show this behavior at least in vitro by performing different experimental procedures such as an invasion assay, in order to confirm that breast CTCs identified as ALDH1hi/TWISTnuc are more aggressive than the others.

3. my concern was addressed

4. my concern was addressed

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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