Reviewer’s report:

1. The question posed by the authors is well defined and clear hypothesized.
2. Methods are overall appropriate and well described. But,
   - How the authors guarantee, that tumor cells obtained for culturing are really squamous carcinoma cells and not e.g. fibroblasts. Did they characterized these cells? Please extend the methods section and discuss.
   - How many investigators evaluated the immunohistochemical signals? In case of different investigators, how were different results discussed and decided?
   - What was the idea of using Ki-67 antibodies, just to indicate proliferation activity? Is there a relation to the investigated targets?
3. Data are otherwise sound and comprehensible.
4. The manuscript adheres to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition.
5. The Discussion and conclusions are well balanced and adequately supported by the data. But, I have some remarks:
   - Discussion part, paragraph 3: The authors discussed the fact, that multivariate risk factor analysis demonstrated that HMGA2 expression serves as an independent prognostic marker for disease-specific overall survival. Do they mean disease-specific or overall or both, which is totally different.
   - Did the authors examined the correlation between HMGA1, HMGA2, let-7, mir-98, Lin28 expression and survival on their own data? Was there a difference between the metastasized and non metastasized cases? Please discuss.
   - in what sense do the authors consider their targets as prognostic tools? To differentiate between metastasized and non metastasized cases, between limited and advanced tumor size etc? Would their tools be useful during follow up after treatment? Please discuss.
6. Limitations of the work are clearly stated.
7. The authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished.
8. The title and abstract accurately convey what has been found.
9. Is the writing acceptable? Yes, after addressing to above remarks:
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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.