Author’s response to reviews

Title: Erythropoietin, uncertainty principle and cancer related anaemia

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Comments about the reviewer comments:

1) There is little or no attention paid to any potential adverse effects of the treatment. Adverse effects need to be considered and discussed, even if none of the trials reported any.

We did address this issue on the text. We explicitly say that no adverse effect could be extracted in ours or in previous articles.

2) The authors report numbers needed to treat based on meta-analysis. This should be accompanied by an appropriate message of caution. Depending on the rate of the outcome in the individual trials this NNT varies widely in different patient groups.

We add a comment about caution on the NNT interpretation

3) The meta-analysis is done using the Peto odds ratio. The studies included are all randomised trials and allow calculation of relative risks. In many of the included trials the outcome rate is high, which means that the odds ratio gives a more extreme result than the relative risk (if the OR is interpreted as a RR, which I assume to be the case). When doing the analysis using the RR, the pooled estimate is less favourable RR = 0.61 (95%CI 0.54-0.68). More importantly, the RR meta-analysis shows great heterogeneity (p=0.0044)! I wonder what happens if all the sensitivity analyses are done using the RR outcome. Possibly some of the heterogeneity can be explained. In my opinion the analysis needs to be repeated with RR as the outcome statistic.

We performed the all analysis again using RR and decided to show it on a figure. We also run a metaregression about heterogeneity and discussed the results on the text. This was a major change on the paper.

4) A number of editorial suggestions: on page 3 under 'what does this paper add?' "settings" in stead of "setting"; on page 8 last sentence of 1st para 'Their exclusion could not significantly altered our findings' this sentence doesn't run well.

We accepted these suggestions.

So, we think all suggestion were accepted and are done now.