Reviewer’s report

Title: Survival of patients with metastatic breast cancer: twenty-year data from two SEER registries

Version: 1 Date: 7 July 2004

Reviewer: KS S CHIA

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General
The objectives of the paper appears to be two-fold: 1. comparison of log-normal mtd with standard life-table approach and 2. comparison of trends in survival from two SEERs registry. The discussion is too convoluted and comprehensive and could be substantially shortened to focus on the two objectives.

For the purpose of comparison between methods, concordance for a single cancer site alone is not acceptable. Are there previous publications to show that the two methods agree for different cancer sites; if not at least present data for breast cancers with localized and regional spread.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
1. What were the confidence intervals of the predicted CSSRs? These should be reported in the results section.
2. The reported survival rates (predicted and computed) appears to be observed survival rates. The standard approach in population-based survival estimates is to use relative survival rate (i.e. 'adjusted' for competing causes of death). This is particularly important when comparison between different populations. Could the RSRs be presented?
3. Instead of the 'cohort' approach, period survival analyses is gaining popularity especially for long-term survival rates. The paper will be made much stronger if this method can also be used and compared with the other two methods.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
1. Page 8, last para of methods. No statistical test of significance is necessary when the aim is to show no difference. The magnitude of the difference is small (even for 1991-1995); statistically significant difference arose from relatively large sample size in relation to the variance.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

Statistical review: No
Declaration of competing interests:

No conflict of interest