Reviewer's report

Title: Prognosis of screen-detected breast cancers: results of a population based study

Version: Date: 16 October 2005

Reviewer: Adri C Voogd

Reviewer's report:

General
The authors have improved their paper substantially. However, some point still need further
clarification to make it fully understandable.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can
be reached)

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

The authors state that they assessed lead-time and length bias by evaluating the mean differences
in follow-up duration between the two groups for each stage and that in the next step they subtracted
the stage-specific difference from the follow-up time in the screen detected group. This description is
not clear. Is this a statistical method that has been used and explained extensively before by other
authors or themselves? If this is the case, then please give appropriate references. If not, then a
further explanation is needed to understand this crucial point of adjusting for calculated lead-time
and length bias (as presented in Figure 2), which could totally alter the conclusions of the study.

In my opinion the paragraph on treatment (starting with "In addition, more women..." and ending with
"...more toxic anthracycline-based regimens" should be omitted, as this information lays out of the
scope of the study, which is about prognosis.

Background, line 19: mammography screening

Methods: please indicate which co-variates have been selected for the Cox proportional
hazards model.

Results: The recall rate was higher in the first round (8.2%) than in the second ....

Results: to participate in a screening programme

Results, "Prognostic factors": The characteristics of the tumours occurring...

Results: Please explain EFS. I would prefer not to use this abbreviation and use "event-free survival"
throughout the paper.
Results: In the univariate analysis of the overall survival, factors associated with a good prognosis were: detection by screening ($p<0.0001$), TNM stage I ($p<0.0001$) ... In a multivariate analysis, diagnosis through the MSP, TNM stage I and ...remained independent prognostic factors (Tab. 5).

Discussion: ... and more than 1.5 fold at the subsequent rounds.

Discussion: Even though there is no direct information on social class status of the population...

Discussion: In fact almost all women participated in the study, whereas in many other countries..

Discussion: the major cause for the decreasing breast cancer mortality is the smaller tumour size, associated with the earlier detection by the MSP.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.