Reviewer's report

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

Version: 6 Date: 27 November 2005

Reviewer: Adri C Voogd

Reviewer's report:

General
The paper has improved considerably and is now acceptable for publication as far as the contents are concerned. The English writing though is still rather poor.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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 description of the methods regarding the adjustment for potential lead-time and length bias has certainly improved the reproducibility of the study. I would suggest some small changes in the phrasing:

"As shown in table 1, screen-detected breast cancers had a more favorable stage at diagnosis than the non-screen-detected cancers. Lead-time bias (i.e., the time interval between cancer detection and death being longer in screen-detected than in non-screen-detected breast cancers, due to early diagnosis) and length bias (i.e., screening being more likely to detect breast cancers with long preclinical phases than rapidly progressive cancers) are two potential sources of bias in the evaluation of the effectiveness of breast cancer screening. In order to limit the effect of lead-time and length bias, information on stage distribution was used as follows:"

Results:
Subtitle "Prognostic factors and treatment" should be "Prognostic factors"

Discussion:
First page, line 22: "...smaller (13 mm vs 19 mm)"
First page, line 24: "Since the crude breast cancer-specific...
Second page, line 4: "A difference was also observed in the subset of node-negative tumours..."
Second page, line 16: "Calculating the 5-year survival rates after adjustment for lead-time and length bias confirmed our finding of a better prognosis of screen-detected cancers. The analysis of..., showed a superimposable.... Although the SMP seems sufficiently cost-effective, we have to realize that 29% of the tumours were not detected by screening. In fact, the MSP did not only miss a small number of interval cancers (n=34) but also did not cover the cancers occurring in patients excluded for screening because of a recent mammogram outside the MSP (n=56) and in women who refused to participate in the screening program" Please omit "So the real loss by screening was about 29%." As this is a repetition. " Our results confirm that the characteristics .." "However, the performance of the MSP compares favourably with the recommendations .."

I suggest that the authors omit the following sentences on page 3 of the discussion, as these items
lay out of the scope of the study:
"Givens the improved capacity....were more frequently treated with breast conserving surgery (75%)"
"Some authors have suggested that, ...followd by radiotherapy (83%)"
"It is recommended that adjuvant treatment... and grading 2-3."

Table 4: please indicate reference categories.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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