Reviewer’s report

Title: Population attributable risk of breast cancer in white women associated with immediately modifiable risk factors

Version: 1 Date: 26 May 2006

Reviewer: John Boyages

Reviewer’s report:

General

This is a very well constructed paper and I recommend publication.

The main concern for all of these types of papers is the complex inter-play of factors which the authors bring out in the second paragraph of page 13.

However, the importance of this paper, like that of Coombes and Boyages is that risks can be translated into numbers that the population understand rather than using just relative risk.

The authors note that their modelling does not take into account the impact of stopping HRT which our group in the Coombes paper could model and are now developing a calculator to determine the baseline risk of breast cancer and model the increase in the absolute risk of breast cancer at 5, 10 years or life-time from various durations of E or E+P type HRT.

I think an important message which is not really brought out in the paper is that it is not just the total use of HRT in the population that increases the potential burden of disease but it is also teh duration of its use. So short-term use will decrease the tumour burden as shown by Coombs.

Nevertheless, this is a solid paper because it looks at he only factors we can do something about - exercise, breast-feeding, HRT etc and the authors need to be congratulated on addressing these. The other "controversial" area which we are examining is age at first birth.

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

NIL

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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 figure labelling should be improved;

2+ - better to use two or more or 2 or more

Figure 1 Legend states EPRT whereas x-axis labels states HRT and the paper uses EPRT. Perhaps use EPRT but spell out what it stands for as figures and tables need to stand alone for quick interpretation

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

I am unclear what "lifetime breastfeeding for 31 months means" P 12 start of 2nd paragraph. That is, is it better to refer to as "breastfeeding for 31 months"
What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

We have a patent pending for a web based calculator for determining the risk of breast cancer - baseline, with HRT or family history combinations as highlighted in our previous studies (Coombes)