Reviewer's report

Title: The associated expression of Maspin and Bax proteins as a potential prognostic factor in intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma

Version: 1 Date: 20 July 2006

Reviewer: Nirag Jhala

Reviewer's report:

General
Innovation:
Authors have utilized a very novel protein Maspin and its related proapoptotic pathway, Bax, in exploring its value as a prognostic marker for a tumor that is highly aggressive and requires greater understanding of its biologic characteristics. This makes the study very interesting and novel. The approach is however not as novel.

Study:
Several conceptual clarities are required for this excellent study so that it becomes important for readers to either use these findings or validate these findings.

1. How did author’s define their cohort of cholangiocarcinoma? The manuscript tends to use CC at one place and then IHCC at other places in the manuscript.
2. Author’s have written that Maspin expression causes either increase or decrease in the tumor volume. Did they mean association? Similar conceptual errors are noted throughout the manuscript.

The study also needs major ENGLISH editing to grasp the full potential of this manuscript.

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

1. Authors must change english and provide conceptual clarities and consistency in the text of the manuscript.

2. In the Method section: Author’s do not provide detailed information on how patients were selected or not included in the study and the reasons for it. Furthermore, it would add value to their descriptions if they include more details of how the tissue sections were selected and which sample types were evaluated (e.g: more differentiated areas or poorly differentiated areas). Introducing the review of control group (adjacent normal/ reactive ductal epithelium) also would help understand the value of analysis that was performed on this valuable resource. Author’s have described how HScore and microvessel density will be evaluated but have not provided any detail on how Bax was evaluated. In addition, it would be useful to describe which part of the tumor was analyzed for micro vessel density and whether new vessels or thick vessels at the periphery were analyzed. Such considerations would make a huge difference in statistical calculations for the outcome analysis.

They also need to provide better descriptions of how they evaluated each marker, how did they correlate it with controls and the basis for using the cut off cut off values.

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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)
Better figures are needed to corroborate the manuscript. It appears that there is a green hue noted in these photomicrographs.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
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: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: No

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