Reviewer's report

Title: Using additional immunohistochemical markers can refine prognosis in triple negative breast cancer

Version: 1 Date: 13 April 2007

Reviewer: Sunil Lakhani

Reviewer's report:

General
The paper by Tischkowitz et al is an interesting study combining datasets from Montreal and Vancouver. The paper demonstrates that TNP cancers are different in terms of survival compared to non-TNP and that this is also true for CBP groups. Further the paper suggests that not all TNP/CBP tumours are uniformly bad in their prognosis and that there is heterogeneity within these groups.

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)

In the abstract and introduction, the authors state that basal cancers were originally defined by expression studies and is now common to define on basis of IHC. Small point but there is a plethora of literature pre-expression profiling showing IHC identified basal phenotype – the expression profiling re-defined it.

I think the data would be a valuable addition to the literature, however, it should be noted that this aspect of heterogeneity has been reported in different ways by other authors. Reference 6 as well as Sotiriou, 2003 PNAS Vol 100, p10393 (not referenced) both show this feature. Further, the paper by Rakha J Pathol 2006 208, p495 is also relevant here (not referenced).

The authors state that there is a difference in survival between TNP and non-TNP – in table 1, the grade is significantly different between the two sets – can the authors comment regarding the relevance of their finding in this setting?

Page 3 end of 1st Para – the authors ref 9-11 in relation to basal/brca1 – the biggest series depicting this is the non-referenced BCLC study Clin Can Res 2005 11, p5175

Bottom page 3/beginning page 4, the authors start out by talking about familial breast cancer and then describe their series -there is room for confusion here since it is not specified that the present data is on sporadic cancers

In material – giving reasons why cases were excluded, the section (c) about DNA quality does not apply here as only IHC has been done. How does this change the numbers? The following line ends in ‘by’ – something is missing.

The discussion relating to different prognosis of the different subgroups identified would also benefit from referencing the papers by Laakso et al, Clin Cancer Res. 2006 12 p4185 and Fulford et al Breast Cancer Res 2007

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

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