Reviewer's report

Title: Prognostic value of histopathology and trends in cervical cancer: a SEER population study

Version: 1 Date: 1 May 2007

Reviewer: John O Schorge

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors have mined data from the SEER database to analyze 30,000 cervix cancer patients over 30 years.

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

1 -- The manuscript is rather lengthy and should be shortened. Much of the Results section could be re-written to complement (not repeat) the data shown in Tables and Figures. The Discussion (including Conclusion paragraph) extends from page 13 through 20 – it could be better focused on the main points.

2 -- The authors should incorporate a few statements in the Discussion that acknowledge the limitations of the SEER database and how this may affect their results and subsequent interpretation of the importance of this study. For example, much of the individual data points are ‘missing’.

3 -- The authors make several references to the utility of HPV vaccine in combating cervix cancer. I would encourage them to pursue this. According to their data, adenocarcinomas are increasingly problematic, yet the general thinking is that these are less likely to be HPV-16 or -18 positive. How does this fit with their mention of the opportunity to vaccinate and prevent these tumors (page 14 Discussion).

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

4 -- It is not clear in the abstract whether the authors are using the SEER database from the USA or Europe or the whole world. Only later is that described, indirectly, in the Discussion. Not everyone is as familiar as the authors with the SEER database, especially for an international journal.

5 -- In the Results section of the Abstract, the authors point out the ‘statistically significant’ variables – however, are they predictive of survival or relapse or what endpoint? Also, which of those HRs are statistically significant?

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

6 -- In the Results section, it would be helpful to have some subtitles to guide the reader in reviewing the data.

7 -- There are many abbreviations used throughout the paper and it can be difficult to keep them straight (ie, CSS).

8 -- On page 15, Kathy Look [1996] did report a GOG study that suggested a worse outcome for some adenosquamous carcinomas.

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: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

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