Reviewer's report

Title: Meta-analysis confirms BCL2 is an independent prognostic marker in breast Cancer

Version: 3 Date: 2 March 2008

Reviewer: Marianne Paesmans

Reviewer's report:

Thanks for the answers to the formulated comments and suggestions. However, I am not convinced by some of them and my feeling is that your review remains potentially biased due to your selection of studies. If I can accept, as already mentioned, your argument that excluding studies of small sample sizes may possibly protect from a publication bias, I am really uncomfortable with the further exclusion of 26 studies (much more than 50% -!- of the studies although I don't know how this translates in terms of the rate of patients excluded) due to insufficient reporting in the publications and the information added on page 12 of the manuscript provides very little on these studies and on the possible impact of having excluded them. I am sorry for having not provided a full reference for the Parmar's paper. Here you are: Parmar MK, Torri V, Stewart L. Extracting summary statistics to perform meta-analyses of the published literature for survival endpoints. Statistics in Medicine, 1998, 17 : 2815-2834.

Again, if it is possible that reporting a hazard ratio is a mark of higher quality, it is also very possible that it reflects some publication bias (you â##or the journals-may consider unuseful to report the value and the confidence limits of the HR estimate when it is not significantly different from 1). The same is true for the choice between publishing an univariate HR or a multivariate hazard ratio adjusted for some important covariates. So, deciding on the exclusion without having performed a quality assessment of the studies appears questionable to me. Further, I believe it is a fair practice in a meta-analysis to have a sensitivity analysis and to provide results using all studies and after exclusion of the studies considered to have a lower quality. As the authors have not done this, I have some difficulties to consider that their work is a systematic review of the evidence available in the literature.

What next?: Reject because scientifically unsound

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.