Reviewer’s report

Title: Gemcitabine versus gemcitabine based combination chemotherapy in advanced pancreatic cancer- Indirect comparison

Version: 1 Date: 16 December 2007

Reviewer: Juan Valle

Reviewer’s report:

In this manuscript, the authors have indirectly compared four gemcitabine-based combination chemotherapy regimens against each other, in the absence of direct head-to-head randomised controlled studies. A non-significant trend was found for survival superiority with gemcitabine-platinum combinations and gemcitabine-capecitabine compared to gemcitabine-5FU or gemcitabine-irinotecan.

Major Compulsory Revisions

The discussion needs to expand on the implications of these findings:
- No combination was found to be significantly superior to others. Is this due to sample size? What were the statistical limitations of the comparison?
- How, if at all, does this change practice?
- What is the way forward?
- Why is there a trend for superiority for capecitabine and not for 5-FU?
- What is the role for a randomised controlled trial in light of these findings and the conclusions by Song et al. that Adjusted indirect comparisons usually but not always agree with the results of head to head randomised trials (Discussion, page 6)

Salient points of this expanded discussion need to also be included in the Conclusions.

Minor Essential Revisions

The randomised control trial referred to on page 3 (Background, reference [2] and on page 6, last paragraph) is a randomised phase II study rather than a phase III study. This needs to be made explicit as the implications are quite different.

A table of selected studies would strengthen the manuscript.

Discretionary Revisions

None
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

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.