Reviewer's report

Title: Resectable adenocarcinomas in the pancreatic head: The retroperitoneal resection margin is an independent prognostic factor

Version: 5 Date: 12 July 2007

Reviewer: Simon R Bramhall

Reviewer's report:

General
The authors have made some attempts at altering the manuscript but I stand by my previous view that as a pathological description of how to assess the resection margins following a pancreaticoduodenectomy then this is a useful addition to the published literature but as an assessment of prognostic factors it is weak because of small numbers. I accept that the manuscript requires some inclusion of these factors but the emphasis is wrong. In addition it is slightly disingenuous to state that the retroperitoneal resection margin has never been described as an independent prognostic factor. In all of the studies referenced in the manuscript resection margin is an independent prognostic factor and as between 80-90% of R1 resections include this margin as the positive margin it makes a mockery of the authors statement in the discussion paragraph 1 'To our knowledge this has not been shown previously'.

In addition the paper is still far too long for the additional knowledge that it imparts and the bulk of this length is in the discussion/conclusion.

If the paper is being sold as a pathological study then the figures are fine but there are too many tables (table 4 unnecessary duplicated intext and some parts of tables 1, 2 and 3 could be combined). If however the authors wish to spin this as a prognostic scoring paper then the reverse applies.

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)

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 limited interest

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.