Reviewer's report

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

Version: 7 Date: 8 November 2007

Reviewer: Roger Davis

Reviewer's report:

General

The presentation is greatly improved and the supplemental materials were very helpful to me. There are just a few modifications that need to be incorporated into the manuscript.

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

1. Statistical analysis section: You should limit variable selection methods to forward selection. Backwards selection is not appropriate for these analyses due to the limited number of events (deaths), particularly in the R0 subgroup. A general guideline for Cox regression is to estimate no more parameters (i.e., beta coefficients) than the number of events divided by 10. This guideline is related to the numerical stability of the estimation process. Your base model includes 9 parameters for a total of 76 deaths. For the R0 subset, there are only about 40 deaths.

2. Adjusted analysis section of results and table 2: The base models (tables 2A and 2B) should not be reported. This section should just indicate that the variables found significant in the unadjusted models were included in a forward selection process and resulted in the adjusted models (2C and 2D).

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

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

3. Statistical analysis section: should begin, “Survival data were obtained. . . .” because the word ‘data’ is a plural form.

4. Statistical analysis section: The sentence “The proportional hazards assumption was tested by comparison of hazard ratios in the overall base model 1 with hazard ratios obtained by stratification by each covariate, and by graphical evaluation of log minus log plots.” should be changed to “The proportional
hazards assumption was evaluated by examination of log minus log plots.”

**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**: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

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