Reviewer's report

Title: Early and very early hepatocellular carcinoma: when and how much do staging and choice of treatment really matter? A multi-center study.

Version: 2 Date: 28 December 2008

Reviewer: Laura Crocetti

Reviewer's report:

The Authors addressed the comments that were aroused on their manuscript, underlining the limitations of the study. Still some revisions are needed to strengthen the manuscript, as listed below:

Minor Essential revisions:

Abstract: Conclusions: It is advisable to smooth even more the conclusive sentences, using for example the past tense (e.g. the patients with very early HCC were very few in this analysis…etc..) as the results of this analysis could not reflect the actual situation in different temporal and geographical settings. The Authors should not forget that radiological techniques underwent a terrific technical development in the last 20 years, with very different capabilities to diagnose very early and early stage HCC in the last 80’ when compared with 90’ and the last 5 years The same concept is applicable to therapeutical procedures, as underlined in the previous comments to this article. The fact that for patients with early HCC using the AASLD guidelines coincides with better survival should be included in the final sentence.

Methods: Which were the criteria that were used to plan the treatment in the patients included in the analysis?

Results: What were the main reasons why the BCLC staging system was not applied after its introduction?

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

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'