Reviewer's report

Title: Osteopontin, asbestos exposure and pleural plaques: a cross-sectional study

Version: 5 Date: 29 January 2011

Reviewer: Bogdan Grigoriu

Reviewer's report:

Minor essential revisions

1. The authors responded to most of the issues raised by the first version of the manuscript. However some minor points remains :
   a. The introduction concerning the modalities of estimating asbestos exposure can be reduced in length
   b. There is no quantitative data concerning smoking included (for both current and ex smokers), the fact that there is only a small number of actual smokers does not limit the analysis.
   c. The authors adds by a different mode of recruitment 8 patients; as stated in the response to comments they were not able to identify the data belonging to those patients and therefore they could not exclude these patients from the analysis. The potential bias still exists but the method is described in Math and method section
   e. The Abstract can in my opinion be shortened and rewritten the number of cases in the abstract is not the same with those in the paper: The discussion section in the abstract is more a conclusion
   d. The data concerning the comparison of the two different assays kit should either be completely removed or entirely presented; a spearman rank correlation of 0,61 is low for such a correlation, restricting correlations to only 12 samples in low part of the calibration curve is not acceptable.

Discretionary revisions

e. In the original comments I have suggested to include a discussion about the fact that osteopontin may be subjected to several modification and cleavage and that the use of different assay kit may give different osteopontin values. The authors included the discussion along with a whole paragraph citing our work WHICH WAS NOT the intend of the remark; therefore the above mentioned paragraph should be shortened and reference to reviewer's papers can be removed at author's discretion.

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 have no competing interests