Reviewer's report

Title: Breast cancer management guidelines: does compliance depend on the local cancer organisation?

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Reviewer: Mark Mccarthy

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   Partly – compliance of treatment with clinical guidelines is described; however, there are various studies in the literature of organisational factors, which should be introduced also at the beginning if this paper wishes to include these as determinants (as in the title).
   Essential

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   Partly - The abstract methods section should say where/how the data were abstracted, and the main methods section should give information on the observer reliability measures used and results. There should be description of the inclusion/exclusion from the whole-population sample (presumably from cancer registry), the levels of missing data and how this was managed (boot-strapping etc).
   Essential

3. Are the data sound?
   At present, the lack of information on population representativeness, data abstraction methods, and record completeness is a weakness (there's a literature on use of secondary data in cancer studies).

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   These items are not mentioned anywhere
   Essential

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   Mostly. However, using a 'justifiable' category is challengeable, since clinical guidelines should be clear. The methods say that absent data were classified as 'justifiable', but not excluded from the study, so we don't really know the true measures. The choice to add 'justifiable' to non-compliant would seem appropriate.
   Discretionary
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
These authors don't describe any limitations as such, nor more modern approaches to structured writing of the discussion section.
Discretionary

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Well, there is a fair sprinkling of literature on clinical guideline comparisons, but I wonder if they searched for a more formal overview. I am not sure what the second sentence of the discussion refers to. 'To our knowledge, this is this first time that results of such investigations have been reported.' I think the first published paper comparing breast cancer treatment practice with guidelines from data in the 1980s was by McCarthy & Bore (European Journal of Cancer and Clinical Oncology 1991, 27, 579-582), and there were several subsequently. The authors could track this literature, and also the literature on organisational factors in cancer care.
Discretionary

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
No. The abstract results should describe local cancer organisation (not just practice) for the title and abstract conclusion to be justified. But as there is little in the main paper about organisation (only private/public hospital, region and teaching status, data are taken from medical records), the second objective set at the beginning of the paper 'to identify factors associated with non-compliance at a clinical and organisational level (LCU)' is difficult to demonstrate ('Finally, introducing the LCU as a random effect significantly decreased the residual variability (LRT, p<0.05), suggesting the presence of heterogeneity of compliance in overall treatment sequence across LCUs and reinforcing the need to keep this variable in our model.') The final 'positive' regression results should not attributed to patients being non-compliant, but surely to the doctors!
Essential

9. Is the writing acceptable?
There could be more lively writing of the discussion, which is rather opaque at present (eg see quotation above).
Discretionary

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