Reviewer's report

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

Version: 2 Date: 23 November 2010

Reviewer: Mark Mccarthy

Reviewer's report:

You have responded in depth to the extensive comments from three referees, and have taken the comments well into account. However, I remain with one clear problem - the title does not reflect the substance of the study.

Major compulsory revision.

The title says 'Breast cancer management guidelines: does compliance depend on the local cancer organisation?' You write: "This is the first time that results of overall [breast cancer] therapeutic care with details on procedures and clinical decision sequences have been reported in a large [breast cancer] population". But the study does not describe the 'local cancer organisation', except clinical aspects.

I propose the title should be: 'Breast cancer care compared with clinical guidelines in France: a retrospective observational study.' Most of the analysis uses the data traditionally available in the medical notes. At the end, you add into the regression the 'local clinical unit', and find further variation. But you haven't stated a prior hypothesis of this, explained what a 'local clinical unit' is (how many hospitals form a 'unit'?), nor gathered any of the data suggested by the literature - eg physicians, beds, nurses, qualifications, regional organisation, teaching hospitals etc - to examine this difference. In the discussion, you say you 'were not able' to collect any organisational data, and yet then say "It therefore seemed that the most interesting data was the LCU".

The abstract conclusion says "Our results highlight the need to study the local cancer unit, a multidisciplinary and multi-hospital organisation, as a possible way to reduce variation [breast cancer] care." While I agree with this statement, I don't see it as the conclusion of your findings. Your results (once again) show the variation between clinical guidelines and practice that has been demonstrated in breast cancer care for 20 years. You have not satisfactorily investigated organisational explanations, and I propose that 'organisational' should not be included in the title, nor the conclusion. The study is about medical practice, not organisation.

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