Author's response to reviews

Title: Burden of disease due to cancer in Spain

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

We are submitting for consideration to BMC Public Health our revised manuscript entitled "Burden of disease due to cancer in Spain".

We thank the Reviewers for their review of the manuscript. Please find attached to this letter the revised version of the manuscript. In this version we have addressed the comments made by the reviewers. We provide below a point-by-point response to their comments and a description of the changes made in the text.

We look forward to your editorial decision.

Sincerely,

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Response to reviewers

Reviewer: Michelle Elisabeth Kruijshaar

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

We have reviewed the text in order to improve the quality of English and have made some changes and corrections. We expect they will be satisfactory. If this is not the case, we would appreciate if you could provide us some details about what you consider that must be changed. A professional translator translated the original manuscript into English, so we would like to have some orientation before making general changes in the text.

Reviewer: Duncan Mortimer

MAJOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS:

1. Burden of Disease: To my mind, the authors’ claims for the role of BoD estimates in priority setting and policy making are still way too strong. The authors argue that “DALYs, as a synthetic indicator, gives information about the potential benefit expected from an effective intervention, in terms of both, mortality and disability” (p13). I would maintain that knowing the capacity to benefit by disease-area tells us nothing about the extent to which capacity to benefit in each disease area can be realized or about which interventions would provide the best means of doing so.

We agree with your comment and we have changed the sentence in order to avoid transmitting an unclear message (p15, first paragraph).

2. Policy relevance: The authors have added text at p12 to the effect that year 2000 BoD estimates will provide a baseline for tracking changes in epidemiology and monitoring progress over time. This is all good in theory but, unless data is being collected that will permit the periodic recalculation of BoD, the tracking/monitoring provides a fairly weak motivation for running BoD calculations.

In the case of cancer, incidence and mortality data are collected prospectively in population registries, and international institutions like IARC periodically publish survival data calculated from information provided by each country. All this information allows us to make BoD calculations periodically and then to study the evolution of this indicator over time. We have added a brief explanation in the text (p12, second paragraph): “In the case of cancer, this would be feasible, given that mortality, incidence and survival data are being collected systematically”.

3. Applicability of disability weights to the Spanish population: Changes made are adequate.
4. Modeling: Regarding methods used in predicting duration, the cited reference provides sufficient background. Regarding methods used in predicting incidence, the cited references are less informative. Reference 21 is a general methods paper describing Bayesian inference using Gibbs sampling. Reference 9 appears to be in Spanish and was not accessible via the link provided at the time of this review. That said, I agree that additional detail regarding methods may detract from the main message of the paper.

Thank you for this remark. We have replaced reference 21. The new reference is more specific to the context and includes a reference to the software used.

With respect to reference 9, we have checked the link and we have had no problem to access the document. Probably, when you tried to access it, the link was temporarily unavailable.

5. Sampling error and parameter uncertainty: The sensitivity analysis (with versus without age-weights) provides a misleading picture of the level of uncertainty associated with the BoD estimates presented in the paper. Each sample parameter describing disease-progression is associated with sampling error (e.g. %treated in the duration model). Failing to conduct sensitivity analysis to take account of this sampling error effectively assumes that are able to estimate population parameters describing disease-progression with certainty. For parameters describing disease-progression that have been based on assumption or expert-opinion, it seems likely that these sources of data are prone to potentially substantial error. Uncertainty might also arise with respect to social values embedded in BoD calculations (including disability weights, discount rates and age-weights). To conduct sensitivity analysis on just one of these variables (i.e., age-weights) effectively assumes that we have perfect knowledge of other social values.

Note, for example, that the source of disability weights (Dutch Disability Weights) might not provide a good indication of social values for the study context. I do note that additional text has been added to the discussion but I am not convinced that this additional text communicates the full extent of uncertainty associated with the BoD estimates reported in the paper.

Thank you for this valuable comment and for your detailed explanation. We are sorry because in the first review, we did not fully understand your comment and did not adequately address it in our review of the manuscript.

In the present revised version, we have added a paragraph with a more detailed discussion of the issue of uncertainty (p13, last paragraph-p14, first and second paragraphs).

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS:
5. Assumptions: Changes made are adequate.

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS:
6. Text: The manuscript contains a number of typos and grammatical errors. Mostly these errors are just distracting and it is still possible to ascertain the authors’ meaning. For example:

“…which makes easier to compare…” (p2).

“…cancer sites ordered by its associated BoD…” (p8).

“There are published weights to be applied to BoD estimates or country-specific disability weights can be obtained” (p12).

“One study shown…” (p12).

“It is acknowledgeable that the…” (p12).

Thank you very much for your help in identifying typos and grammatical errors. We have corrected them and have made a general review of the English in the manuscript.