Author’s response to reviews

Title: Early and similar matrix alterations in alveolar and small airway walls of COPD patients.

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A new version of the manuscript has been uploaded, in which as requested, authors contribution, competing interest and acknowledgement sections were added.

In response to the request for an ethics statement the following sentence was added to the methods section: “This study was conducted in compliance with the Helsinki Declaration”.

We cannot state that a medical ethics committee approved the study or that participants provided written informed consent. This is because the legal setting in the Netherlands is as follows: Patients of the University Hospital Maastricht are made aware that tissue obtained through medical procedures that is not used for diagnostic purposes can be used for research. If they do not wish their tissues to be used for research, they should formally object. The department of pathology of the Maastricht University Hospital stores tissues in the Maastricht Pathology Tissue Collection (MPTC). Approval to use these materials is obtained from a review committee that governs this tissue collection. Approval does not and cannot be obtained from the local ethics committee. The procedure that was followed is as is written in the manuscript in agreement with the "Code for Proper Secondary Use of Human Tissue in the Netherlands". Information can be found on http://www.fmwv.nl, but regretfully this is only available in Dutch.