Reviewer's report

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

Version: 3 Date: 17 December 2013

Reviewer: Gaetan Deslee

Reviewer's report:

The authors have analyzed extracellular matrix remodeling in alveolar and small airway wall in COPD. This is a very important topic regarding the pathophysiology of COPD. The paper is well written and provides interesting findings. It is of particular interest to provide data comparing ECM in alveolar and small airway wall.

Major comments:
1) Do the authors have access to mRNA on the same lung samples? It would be of great interest (if available) to analyze mRNA expression of ECM components.
2) The reference 22 which is cited page 11, line 4, does not seem to be appropriate to support the discussion regarding a decrease in elastin-to-collagen index.

Minor comments:
1) Could the authors clarify if the % predicted values for FEV1 and FEV1/FVC are post-bronchodilation?
2) Do the authors have access to CT scan measurements of lung density? It would be interesting to analyze the relationships between ECM data and lung density measured by CT Scan?
3) The findings of a decrease in COPD for elastin in alveolar wall are not in line with previous findings showing an increase in elastic fiber density in very severe COPD compared to controls (Deslee, ERJ 2009; 324-331). It is always interesting to report different findings. Could the authors could add a comment on this point?
4) Even if it's not exactly the same topic, did the the authors analyze perivascular elastin/collagen? It would be interesting to assess if the findings are the same around blood vessels compared to alveolar and small airway wall.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.