Reviewer's report

Title: Histometric data obtained by in vivo confocal laser scanning microscopy in patients with systemic sclerosis

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Reviewer: Prof Henrica de Vet

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept after discretionary revisions

The revised version of the paper has been improved on the following aspects:
- the purpose of the study is better described now
- the conclusion is drawn more cautiously and in correspondence with the design of the study.
- the fact that the EcP control group is younger is discussed now.

At some points the paper can still improved
- the terminology of the design: this is not a explorative controlled trial. A trial is a study in which the effects of certain interventions is studied in a specific patient population. Here the characteristics of three different groups of patients compared. As I suggested in my previous comment, label this design as an explorative diagnostic case control study. (compulsory revision)
- No answer is given why there were ten measurements per subjects and how was the variation within these measurements. It is informative for the readers to know whether ten measurements are necessary, and why it was decided to do ten repetitions. (discretionary revision)
- I object against the use of the word aExchangeETM if two groups are compared concurrently and there is no comparison of the SSC group before and after. In most situations the word aExchangeETM should be replaced by aEdifferenceETM. (discretionary revision)
- Even in an explorative diagnostic study, presentation of overlap between the groups is more informative than presenting means and standard deviations (discretionary revision)

Competing interests:
None declared.