Reviewer's report

Title: The effect on survival of continuing chemotherapy to near death

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Reviewer: Michael Obermeier

Reviewer's report:

The article is from a statistical point of view well written and offers a highly informative description of its adequately applied statistical techniques. The three methods used allow, especially in combination, the control and deactivation of confounders in retrospective studies and are therefore appropriate to answer the question of treatment benefit in this context.

Nevertheless the retrospective grouping of the patients still is not very satisfying: patients who survived after stop of chemotherapy more than 14 days are supposed to have gotten a “standard approach”, patients who died within 14 days got an “aggressive approach”. It is easy to see that the variable to explain (i.e. time of survival) is already partly included in the explaining variable. If there is no other possibility to perform the three groups this fact has to be more prominently discussed in the limitations.

Even if the authors already included some important points in this context, like e.g. the point of unexplained toxic deaths resulted from chemotherapy, their main statement remains unrelativised that aggressive treatment does not seem to prolong patients’ life. But the question is if their surrogate definition of aggressive treatment really measures aggressive treatment and, on the other hand, if the definition of standard chemotherapy really measures standard chemotherapy.

Minor point: the (Kruskal-Wallis?) test used for overall p-values in table 1 was not stated in the statistic part.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests