Reviewers report

Title: Health Status After Cancer: Does It Matter Which Hospital You Belong To?

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Reviewer: Ryan Spencer

Reviewers report:

I offer my congratulations to the authors for an extremely in-depth analysis of the possibility and utility of using post diagnosis employment as an additional quality indicator for cancer care. It is obvious that much time and effort has been spent in statistical analyses to further the knowledge of cancer care as patients enter a difficult stage of life as a “cancer survivor.” Please see below for questions that I had regarding the manuscript. I appreciate the opportunity to review the manuscript and await the authors’ responses.

Please number your comments and divide them into

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1) On page 5 of the manuscript the authors disclose that, “more than 70 percent of the total number of cancer patients is excluded from the analysis” due to restrictions placed on age. While the study population is still > 46,000, my concern is the ability to appropriately generalize the study to the clinical setting and to compare the merits of the proposed quality indicator – post diagnosis employment – with traditional quality indicators (i.e. survival as suggested by the authors) if such a large majority of cancer patients is excluded from analysis. The reason for the exclusion is clearly laid out by the authors but no mention is made as to the potential biases/consequences to the results or conclusions of using “return to employment” as an appropriate quality indicator for patients diagnosed with cancer.

2) In the introduction, the authors state that “in our empirical analysis, [we] assign patients to the hospital they belong (i.e. to their hospital catchment area) rather than to the hospital(s) they were actually treated at.” The authors then write in their conclusions that “it may actually matter which hospital you belong to” due to “large differences in outcomes.” It seems difficult to draw conclusions about a hospital or health-care system’s quality measures if you are using outcomes for patients who should have been treated at a particular hospital rather than patients who were actually treated at that hospital. Would it not have been possible or appropriate to have conducted the empirical analyses based on the hospital patients were actually treated at? Additionally, how can we be sure that there are not variables intrinsic to the regions of poorer performing hospitals that account for these differences (i.e. socioeconomic status, urban vs. rural, etc)?
3) Since there is now “free hospital choice,” what effect do the authors believe that this has on the quality indicators measured in this study and how are these quality indicators still applicable to the hospital catchment areas currently?

- Minor Essential Revisions

4) Figures 1 and 2: It may be helpful to the reader to have a note stating that the catchment area rank as noted along the ordinate axis is listed from top (#55 appears to be assigned to the best performer) to bottom (#1 assigned to the worst performer) based on post hoc analysis of performance in that variable (survival rate or employment rate).

- Discretionary Revisions

5) The use of e.g. in paragraph #2 of discussion and in paragraph #1 of conclusion. In the majority of instances “e.g.” is used in parentheses, however in these two instances they are not and the phrasing may be awkward for some readers.

What next?

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Based on your assessment of the validity of the manuscript, what do you advise should be the next step?

- Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revision

Level of interest

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- An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English

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- Acceptable

Statistical review

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Is it essential that this manuscript be seen by an expert statistician?

- No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests

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I declare that I have no competing interests.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.