Reviewer’s report

Title: Transthoracic approach to Persistent Atrial fibrillation First. The TOP-AF trial: a controlled randomized trial of a staged minimally invasive approach to persistent atrial fibrillation

Version: 3 Date: 12 January 2014

Reviewer: john hummel

Reviewer’s report:

Major Comments

1. The manuscript lines are not numbered making it difficult to comment on details of the English grammar and sentence structure of the work. While the English is understandable, there are enough errors in grammar and poor sentence structure that the entire manuscript should be corrected by someone who speaks English as a first language.

2. Under “Methods” the authors state that the control group will undergo the standard strategy of PCA. However, there is no standard strategy for PeAf. The spectrum of ablation ranges from laboratories that employ PVI alone (in order to limit procedure time and risk for the minority of patients that will respond to PVI while accepting a high second procedure rate) to those laboratories that employ a staged approach until termination of afib is achieved. Still others are now using rotor based approaches only for this population. It appears that the authors will need to state the PCA methods that will be used in the study for the readers benefit or will at least state in the manuscript that the exact technique used will be documented for comparison. If the exact PCA approach employed is not to be prescribed this should be listed as a limitation of the trial (in fact it may make a direct comparison unable to be interpreted). The exact surgical line set and whether exclusion of the LAA with surgical ablation should also be described.

Minor Comments

1. The abbreviation RSR was not defined unless I missed it.

2. There is no limitations section.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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

Declaration of competing interests:
No competing interests