Reviewer's report

Title: Prognostic significance of Epstein-Barr virus infection in gastric cancer: a meta-analysis

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Reviewer: Corey Casper

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This manuscript by Liu et. al. attempts to answer the question of whether Epstein Barr Virus (EBV) status impacts survival after a diagnosis of gastric cancer through the conduct of a systematic review. Overall, the review is well-conducted according to established practices and identifies a sufficient number of cases to allow for a meaningful analysis and interpretable results.

Specific comments are listed below:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The authors include studies in which meet defined criteria for EBV determination (ISH for EBER), but it would be informative to know what studies failed to meet the authors' criteria for "sensitive and reliable" methods for EBV detection and were therefore discarded and what method these studies used. Did the exclusion of these studies influence the results of the systematic review?

2. The endpoint for the authors' analysis is "overall survival", but no time point for this endpoint is specified. Obviously studies with insufficient follow-up or heterogeneity in reported OS time periods could lead to bias or misclassification in this systematic review.

3. A limitation of this study is that it infers causality between EBV status and survival in patients with gastric cancer, but other factors can account for differences in survival between EBV+ patients and EBV-negative patients. It would be informative to see how the established prognostic factors for gastric cancer survival differed between EBV+ and EBV-negative cases across the studies (TNM, etc). Also, EBV+ gastric cancers are typically located in non-antral sites. A discussion of how differences in tumor location may impact survival is warranted.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

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