Reviewer's report

Title: Neutrophil/Lymphocyte Ratio has no predictive or prognostic value in breast cancer patients undergoing preoperative systemic therapy

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Reviewer: Jennifer M Giltnane

Reviewer's report:

The authors have annotated a cohort of patients receiving presurgical systemic therapy and tested the hypothesis that an unproven, yet easily accessible, marker of systemic inflammation (complete blood count, Neutrophil to Lymphocyte ratio) will predict response to treatment. The findings are nonetheless important to publish, so that the accessible evidence for or against the biomarker at hand can be assessed fairly by the scientific field.

Their findings are squarely negative, showing a trend in the entire population, and no correlation when analyzed in apparently unplanned subgroups.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The paper should be refocused on one clinical subtype of breast cancer. Although cohort numbers will be smaller, not doing so ignores strong evidence that clinical subtypes have different natural histories with systemic neoadjuvant therapy. Given improved presurgical responses to systemic therapy, yet overall poor prognosis, I suggest triple negative breast cancer, but this is up to the authors' discretion.

2. In my opinion, the paper uses an outdated method (modified Sinn regression score) to score pathological response to neoadjuvant therapy. A 2013 paper comparing multiple methods showed that regression of the tumor in the lymph node is key factor in prediction of long-term response. The authors should re-score the cohort with at least one other method that incorporates lymph node status. The reference, which I am not associated with, follows:


Minor Essential Revisions

1. There are scattered typos, including non-English spelling of figure legends, to be corrected.

Discretionary Revisions

1. The authors reference Krenn-Pilko et al, 2014; authors who evaluated the
effect of preoperative platelet-to-lymphocyte Ratio and found it to be significant for long-term outcome. This seems like an easy, obvious addition to the study at hand that would take minimal additional work.

2. The authors also reference Loi et al, 2014, and others in independent analyses, showing the utility of evaluating lymphocytic infiltration in the assessment of response in triple negative breast cancer. Given these findings, it would an admirable addition to the current study to validate this hypothesis.

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

**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.