Reviewer’s report

Title: Validation of the 8th Edition UICC/AJCC TNM staging system for HPV associated oropharyngeal cancer patients managed with Contemporary Chemo-Radiotherapy

Version: 0 Date: 26 Jan 2019

Reviewer: Max Robinson

Reviewer’s report:

This study examines the utility of AJCC/UICC TNM8 Classification for 'HPV-related oropharyngeal squamous cell carcinoma'. The findings are consistent with published literature demonstrating improved prognostication of TNM8 for this disease. The term 'p16 positive oropharyngeal squamous cell carcinoma' should be used in preference to 'HPV-related oropharyngeal squamous cell carcinoma' to match the AJCC/UICC terminology.

The study findings are limited by the relatively small number of cases for this type of study (n=153). The relatively small number of cases means analysis of subgroups is underpowered, which is further confounded by censored data and the low frequency of events (death, distant metastasis).

The authors should indicate the missing data for smoking (n=15).

T and N 'stage' should be T and N 'category'.

Which p16 assay was used?

The authors should moderate the discussion around 'de-escalation' and cite the recent studies reported in the Lancet:


Any investigation of 'deescalated' treatment should only be investigated as part of a clinical trial.

The KM curve plots are not very clear and colors should be considered.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

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