Author's response to reviews

Title: Prognosis and postoperative genital function of function-preservative surgery of pelvic autonomic nerve preservation for male rectal cancer patients

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Mr. Eden Nonato

Thank you for your letter and the valuable advice. We also greatly appreciate the positive comments from the reviewers. Their comments have not only helped to improve this manuscript but also provided us with ideas for future studies. Please convey our thanks to these experts.

We would like to re-submit our manuscript, which has been revised according to the comments of the reviewers. We have addressed each comment raised by the reviewers and revised the paper accordingly. All amendments are highlighted in red font in the revised manuscript. Point-by-point replies are included below. Furthermore, this manuscript has been edited and proofread by an English teacher of Sun Yat-sen University. We hope that the revised manuscript is now acceptable for publication in your journal.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Jianping Wang, Ph.D.

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Response to Reviewers’ Comments:

EDITORIAL COMMENTS:

The manuscript needs to be extensively edited. Be sure to address all questions and comments raised by the Reviewers in the text (please mark your changes with bold text or highlight function), and submit a point-by-point reply to each comment. The manuscript needs revision of English language, starting from the Title that is confounding and senseless in some aspects.

Answer: Thank you for your comments. We have addressed each comment raised by the reviewers and revised the paper accordingly. All amendments are highlighted in red font in the revised manuscript. Point-by-point replies are included below. Furthermore, this manuscript has been edited and proofread by an English teacher of Sun Yat-sen University. We hope that the revised manuscript is now acceptable for publication in your journal.

Reviewer #1:

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. The title is incomprehensible and needs to be rephrased.

Answer: We have changed the title as: Prognosis and postoperative genital function of function-preservative surgery of pelvic autonomic nerve preservation for male rectal cancer patients. Thank you!

2. The English language deserves a deep and meticulous revision covering all
aspects: Spelling, grammar, and phrasing.

**Answer:** OK. We have revised this manuscript, which has been edited and proofread by an English teacher of Sun Yat-sen University. All amendments are highlighted in red font in the revised manuscript. Please check. Thank you!

3. In the introduction the authors refer to statistics without mentioning its geographical origin

**Answer:** Thank you for your advice. We have added the geographical origin: Guangdong Province.

4. In the technique, the authors refer to previous explanations not present in the text.

**Answer:** We have added a brief explanation. Please check. Thank you!

5. The preoperative and postoperative techniques should be mentioned in their order of occurrence in relation to the operation.

**Answer:** We have revised the order according to the occurrence in relation to the operation as: Patient care was managed carefully, perioperatively. Oral bowel preparation and nasogastric tubes were planted as routine use. One day before the surgery, patients were given Soffodex, containing 2.4 g of monobasic sodium phosphate and 0.9 g of dibasic sodium phosphate for mechanical bowel preparation (MBP). Postoperatively, minimal use of drains, early unrestricted postoperative oral intake of fluids and light diet, early mobilization, selected use of epidural catheters,
and restricted use of narcotics were performed. Preoperative carbohydrate loading was not used. Postoperative pain control was selectively performed by epidural catheters and patient controlled analgesia (PCA). Patients were allowed home when discharge criteria were met.

Please check!

6. In erection evaluation, the authors classify (I = no difference compared with pre-operation, as normal erection), later in exclusion criteria, they mentioned those who have preoperative erectile dysfunction. This means that all preoperative should be normal, thereby classification definition should be corrected.

**Answer:** Thank you for your question. We think that preoperative genital function should be normal. And that our classification definition was just used to evaluate the postoperative genital function by erection function and ejaculation function before discharge of patients. Please check. Thank you!

7. In the methodology, patients used TNM staging to classify patients, while in results they used Dukes staging.

**Answer:** We have revised methodology as Dukes staging. Please check. Thank you!

8. Table (2), hospital stay is not related to this table.

**Answer:** OK. We have deleted this index. Thank you!
9. As presented in the methodology, erectile/ejaculation stage, and disease stage should all appear in the result tables, and should be statistically analyzed (analysis of variance).

**Answer:** We have statistically analyzed the disease stage. Please check Table 2. Thank you!

10. The authors have classified 4 surgical levels of PANP in the methodology, however, they did not mention their relation to the results.

**Answer:** We have discussed it in the discussion part, as “PANP might be used according to the invasion depth of the RC tumor. For patients of Dukes A phrase, completely retain the pelvic autonomic nerve; for patients of ducks B or C phrases with tumor upon the peritoneal reflection, cut off the hypogastric nerve, and retain the pelvic plexus; for patients of ducks B or C, cut off the hypogastric nerve and unilateral pelvic plexus, and retain the other lateral pelvic plexus; for patients with lateral lymph nodes metastases, completely cut off the hypogastric nerve and bilateral pelvic plexuses.”. There is not a direct relation between the PANP classification and postoperative genital function. It was just selected according to the tumor phrase. Thank you!

11. Although the authors have a long-term FU for local recurrence, no genital function erectile dysfunction has been tested during this FU. This is of great importance, since many of these functions may improve later with time, or may decrease later if
postoperative RT is given.

**Answer:** We have evaluated the genital function alf a year after surgery, and similar result was indicated about the genital function (Table 2). Thank you!

12. The recommendation has no basis in the results.

**Answer:** We have revised the recommendation in the abstract. Please check!

Reviewer #2:

1. The authors state that they have a paper looking at genital functional outcomes in males; the second half of the title does not really make sense to me. The 'purpose' states it is looking at local recurrence/ but that should be stated as a secondary (and important) endpoint of the paper.

**Answer:** We have changed the title. And the secondary endpoint was also added as local recurrence.

2. Why was the length of stay longer in nerve preservation group?

**Answer:** We think that PANP surgery may lead to less injury to genital vessels with less blood loss, and then fast recovery. Therefore, PANP group had shorter hospital stay time.

3. Why did you not examine bladder function results? That would be quite interesting data to show.
Answer: Thank you for your advice. Our study is mainly to investigate the genital function. For the bladder function, another group in urinary department of our hospital will study.

4. What is the technique of PANP? please describe what specific steps are taken / technique of PANP

Answer: OK. We have added the steps in the “Surgical Technique” part as: First, revealing sacral nerve plexus and hypogastric nerve (Ejaculation nerve); second, preservation of the integrity of at least one-side parietal pelvic fascia; third, preservation of the envelop of seminal vesicle (Denonvilliers facia).

5. Overall, good paper with strong numbers. Please correct the multiple grammatical and spelling errors

Answer: OK. We have revised this manuscript, which has been edited and proofread by an English teacher of Sun Yat-sen University. All amendments are highlighted in red font in the revised manuscript. Please check. Thank you!