Reviewer’s report

Title: Robotic radical antegrade modular pancreatosplenectomy (RAMPS) versus standard retrograde pancreatosplenectomy (SRPS): study protocol for a randomized controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 13 Jan 2020

Reviewer: Kirsty Loudon

Reviewer's report:

This is the editorial comment

Thank you for your comprehensive editing of the manuscript and I noted that you are now following the latest guidance on using SPIRIT to embed the item numbers in your manuscript. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of missing information that is essential for the protocol and I was unable to find a point by point response to my SPIRIT items comments in the first review. Please do this for this second review. In particular there is an issue with the PI who is also the sponsor and there is insufficient information the analysis which requires a definition of the primary outcome and why that was selected for your RCT.

Item 4: "Department of Hepatobiliary and Pancreatic Surgical Oncology, Chinese People's Liberation Army General Hospital (CPGH). This finding is conducted without outside funding." There is an error - I think you mean "This randomised controlled trial is conducted without external funding."
Item 5a: "Rong Liu is the corresponding author. Gong Zhang, Yuhao Kang, Haifeng Zhang, Fei Wang are the authors of the article in order of contributions." Please insert the affiliations of ALL the authors.

Item 5b: Role of study sponsor and funders, if any, in study design; collection, management, analysis, and interpretation of data; writing of the report; and the decision to submit the report for publication, including whether they will have ultimate authority over any of these activities.

In the conduct of a clinical trial, a sponsor is an individual, institution, company or organization (for example, a contract research organization) that takes the responsibility to initiate, manage or finance the clinical trial, BUT DOES NOT ACTUALLY CONDUCT THE INVESTIGATION.

I do not believe you have inserted the correct SPONSOR information, you Rong Liu are the lead author so there would be conflict of interest if you were the sponsor and you have not stated there are conflicts of interest. Perhaps you could refer to the funder of the trial. Is there an individual in the Chinese People's Liberation Army General Hospital (CPGH) perhaps in the Research Department you could refer along with their contact information? What is the information stated in the Chinese Clinical Trial Registry and in your submission to Ethics?

Item 5c: As stated in my first review, the usual entry for this item is the following example: "The sponsor played no part in study design; collection, management, analysis, and interpretation of data; writing of the report; and the decision to submit the report for publication". Please ascertain the role of the funder in this project.
Item 6b: please insert the page number for the explanation for the choice of the two comparators in the RCT. I believe this information is currently include under Item 6a on page 3 and 4. In the current manuscript you have included it on page 6, under the following heading. "Interventions Explanation for the choice of comparators {6b}" - the incorrect information is currently in the protocol please edit.

Item 11c: Please state in the SPIRIT checklist that Adherence is not an issue for patients as this is a surgical trial and indicate if there is monitoring of surgeons to check procedures.

Item 11d: There is currently information on page 8 for the relevant concomitant care. However you need to add the following on Page 7 and 8 which has been incorrectly inserted as 11c - "Concurrent and supportive treatments Antibiotics, blood products, analgesics, H2 blockers and proton pump inhibitors will be determined by the surgeon for intraoperative and postoperative management. In addition, there are no regulations for drugs used to control complications and adverse events."

Item 12: Primary outcome - please define: "rates of margins" and state why you have chosen this with reference. Do you mean for example less than 2mm, more than 2mm and will you be considering positive if malignant cells were present in one of the tissue edges? Under sample size - item 14 you also state "post operative marginal resection rate" - please be consistent with terminology and define.

Item 19: Please spell out PLGH and put into abbreviations at the end of the manuscript.

Item 20a: There is no sufficient information on Statistical methods for analysing primary and secondary outcomes currently. Reference to where other details of the statistical analyses plan can be found, if not in the protocol. In addition, will treatment effects be presented with 95% confidence intervals. And will all analyses be performed and reported in accordance with the CONSORT statement and the ICH E9 'Statistical Principles in Clinical Trials'. Your primary outcome is "the rates of margins" it is unclear how you are defining that (please see Item 12).

Item 20b: please complete methods for any subgroup analysis, if not please state this. The statement "Each subgroup will be counted in the same way" does not make sense. Will the data be broken down to consider differences in participants so for instance: gender, age, time since diagnosis, surgeon undertaking the operations,

Item 21b: "We will discontinue the trial when there are significant differences in the outcome of the interim data or when all patients have been collected." Please clarify this statement and your stopping rules to explain what would be an anticipated significant difference and state WHICH OUTCOME (with definition see Item 12). I think you may mean "when all patients have been recruited to reach the required sample size."

You state later under Item 21a "DMC is authorized to discontinue clinical studies in the event of unexpected surgical results." It would be helpful if you could outline what these might be.

Item 25: you state that you will "first notify the sponsor and funder, then principal investigator (PI)" yet at the moment, the sponsor is also the PI - Rong Liu - which cannot be correct but currently in the manuscript they are the same person. This item conflicts with earlier statements. Please check and edit. Item 26a: It was unclear who was actually recruiting the patient? The trial coordinator, surgeon? When is this done?

References: There were 2 articles that could not be checked, please check format for websites, include date checked and ensure sufficient information as in guidelines below. Three articles were not validated (https://trialsjournal.biomedcentral.com/submission-guidelines/preparing-your-manuscript/study-protocol/#references).
Level of interest
Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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All images and figures within the manuscript should be genuine i.e. without evidence of manipulation. No specific feature within an image may be enhanced, obscured, moved, removed, or introduced. If you have concerns about the veracity of the figures you should choose the first option below.

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Is it essential that this manuscript is seen by an expert statistician? If so, please give your reasons in your report.

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No