Author’s response to reviews

Title: Individual Patient Data Network Meta-Analysis using either Restricted Mean Survival Time Difference or Hazard Ratios: is there a difference? A case study on locoregionally advanced nasopharyngeal carcinomas

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Reviewer reports:

Thank you for your patience regarding this manuscript. I've just recently been assigned it but I'm happy to conclude that the majority of the points raised by the reviewers have been dealt with effectively. However, I was hoping you could respond to the second point raised by reviewer 1 below regarding Figure 1 as it appears the initial comment was misinterpreted. I'd like to reassure the authors that I'm conscious that this manuscript has been in our process for some time now and that I will process the revised submission as a priority.

Reply: The authors would like to thank the reviewers and the new editor for the time dedicated to their careful review and for their comments.

Reviewer #1: I thank the authors for their clarifications, and I apologize if my comments were sometimes unclear.

I still have two comments:
1. Acknowledging the handling of competing risks was suboptimal in the discussion is better than nothing, but still suboptimal as compared to using a better approach since it exists. Nevertheless, this is not the central point of the present work.

Reply: the authors would respectfully agree with the reviewer on this point. Thank you.

2. My remark on the figure 1 was more than I have the impression (although this is not clearly. Stated in the legend) that it gives the rmstD and HR for each individual trial comparison (now I get the point, sorry). So it nicely shows how each treatment effect measure relates to the other at the individual trial level, which could be the aim of a meta-epidemiology study, but not of NMA. I would have preferred the same figure with either NMA summary effects or p-scores, because this is more directed at investigating how much results are affected by the use of rmstD instead of HR in an NMA, and not to describe the treatment effect in an individual trial, which—as underlined by the other reviewer—has already been studied elsewhere.

Reply: thank you for the clarification. You can find in the revised manuscript a new figure 1 that correspond to your request.

We added after "We observed a reversal of the ranking of the treatments ranked 2nd and 3rd compared to rmstD(t*= 10 years)" the following sentences: "For both endpoints, OS and PFS, p-scores obtained using rmstD(t*=10 years) and HRs are given in the Figure 1 for the seven treatments."

This new figure 1 was also cited for PFS: "The results of PFS (Table 5, Figure 1 and Figure 3, supplementary data) were in agreement with OS and CRT-AC remains ranked first."

The previous figure 1 was added in the supplementary material, as figure 3. And then supplementary figure 3 became figure 4 and figure 4 became figure 5.