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Peer Review

Review of: "Computationally Optimized ctDNA Surveillance for Recurrence Detection in HPV-Positive Head and Neck Squamous Cell Carcinoma"

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A very interesting article that looks at optimizing screening models for HPV-positive oropharyngeal malignancies with two orders of personalization, namely the stage of disease and smoking status, and then goes on to derive the cost benefits compared to the standard guidelines. There are a few issues, however, that remain unaddressed, in my opinion; some of these are:

1. Much like screening, surveillance studies must focus on reducing mortality rather than improving survival in order to be clinically meaningful; this aspect has not been taken into consideration.
2. Unless clinical action plans can be developed on the basis of positive ctDNA titres suggesting recurrence, cost savings is the only benefit, rather than an improvement in clinical outcomes.
3. The authors have done away with imaging in their recommendations altogether; since early PET has a high Negative Predictive Value, perhaps this could have been incorporated along with ctDNA testing to develop separate recommendations for PET-negative and PET-positive population subgroups.

I must confess my unfamiliarity with the mathematics used in the study and thereby cannot claim to have understood how the researchers arrived at their proposed model. Nevertheless, it is a relevant article that appears to be scientifically sound and mandates exploration for eventual adoption into the clinic.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

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