Reply to the Letter to the Editor
“Limitations of molecular detection of CK19 mRNA-positive cells in the peripheral blood of breast cancer patients with histologically negative axillary lymph nodes” by V. Pitini et al. (Ann Oncol 2005; 16: 1845)

First, some of the circulating tumor cells detected by the nested RT-PCR method specific for CK-19 mRNA could be apoptotic and the method is certainly not able to distinguish between non-viable and clonogenic cancer cells. However, the detection of these cells has been shown to correlate with clinical outcome [1, 2]. Moreover, other investigators have demonstrated that these cells have a proliferative potential in cultures, which is also of clinical significance [3, 4]. Taken together, I believe that the present evidence suggests that although some of the tumor cells may very well be apoptotic, other circulating tumor cells are viable and able to proliferate.

Secondly, we agree that false-positive results from illegitimate expression of CK19 or expression of pseudogenes cannot be ruled out using this detection method. This is acknowledged in our reference publication [1], which is cited in the article as reference number 19.
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References


doi:10.1093/annonc/mdi350
Published online 21 June 2005