Author's response to reviews

**Title:** A critical analysis of test-retest reliability in instrument validation studies of cancer patients under palliative care: a systematic review

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Dear Editor

I am pleased to submit a research article entitled “A critical analysis of test-retest reliability in instrument validation studies of cancer patients under palliative care: a systematic review” for consideration for publication in the BMC Medical Research Methodology.

Symptoms and health-related quality of life (HRQoL) should be assessed by using adequately validated patient-reported outcome instruments. The validation process needs to achieve validity and reliability standards. Among reliability analysis parameters, test/retest reliability is an important psychometric property. Retested patients must be in a clinically stable condition. This is particularly problematic in palliative care settings because advanced cancer patients are prone to a faster rate of clinical deterioration. Therefore, we aimed to review the methods by which multi-symptom and HRQoL based on patient-reported outcomes have been validated in oncological palliative care settings with regards to test-retest reliability. For this, a systematic review was performed.

We determined that test-retest reliability has been infrequently and poorly evaluated. Multi-symptom instruments were retested over a shortened time interval when compared to HRQoL. The confirmation of clinical stability was an important factor in our analysis, and we suggest that special attention be focused on clinical stability when designing a patient-reported outcome validation study that includes advanced cancer patients under palliative care.

We believe that our systematic review is appropriate for publication by the BMC Medical Research Methodology because it is on methodological approaches to healthcare research. Moreover, our study is relevant because it addresses an important topic (test-retest reliability) in an understudied population (palliative care cancer patients). We think that our manuscript is within the scope of the journal, because it summarizes the present state of knowledge concerning an important psychometric property.

All authors are aware and agree with the content of the paper. This manuscript has not been published and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. We have no conflicts of interest to disclose. If you feel that the manuscript is appropriate for your journal, we suggest the following reviewers:

1. Camilla Zimmermann. Princess Margaret Hospital, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. E-mail: camilla.zimmermann@uhn.ca.
2. Robert Cummins – Professor, School of Psychology, Melbourne Burwood Campus. E-mail: robert.cummins@deakin.edu.au.
3. Caroline B Terwee. VU University Medical Center, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, EMGO Institute for Health and Care Research, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: cb.terwee@vumc.nl.

Thank you for your consideration!

Yours sincerely,

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