Reviewer's report

Title: Consultation etiquette in general practice: a qualitative study of what makes it different for lay cancer caregivers

Version: 1 Date: 22 August 2011

Reviewer: Judy Wakeling

Reviewer's report:

This is a clearly outlined, methodologically sound paper. The background section is extensive and informative and the methods are appropriate. The way the data were analysed is well-described, suggesting rigour and giving confidence in the findings. Clear references are made to the larger study of which this forms a part. The results are clearly presented by theme and the discussion is good. Limitations are acknowledged.

Discretionary Revisions

Overall study design
I wondered why the authors just chose to look at the experiences of caregivers of those with cancer? I would assume that many of the difficulties relating to their own health needs would be the same if they were caregivers of someone with, say dementia (indeed the authors discuss the findings of another paper looking at dementia caregivers). So perhaps a sentence justifying the restriction of the study to cancer caregivers would be useful.

A separate AIMS section would be helpful, both in the abstract and the main paper. The aims are clearly stated but are embedded in the background sections.

Methods
In Participants section, it would be good to make an explicit link to Table 1 which provides the demographic information of those interviewed. A bit more information on how the purposive sample was selected would be good - i.e. why did the authors choose to sample people with certain characteristics?

Table 1 gives both numbers and percentages. I would leave out the percentages since the numbers involved here are so small - the use of percentages in qualitative research is rarely advisable as it implies quantification and larger numbers.

The Design paragraph of the Methods section says that the study 'explored the potantial benefit of using a self-completed checklist to guide the GP consultaion...' This implies that the study actually tested the use of a checklist, whereas the use of the checklist is actually part of the larger study. Therefore I think this part of the sentence should be removed as it is misleading.

Results
I think numbers, not percentages/proportions, should be used throughout the results section, as noted above in relation to table 1.

Sentence 4 in Results section: 'The number of caregiver participants was smaller than expected' needs some elaboration. How many caregivers were actually approached and how many declined? Limitations section later on mentions the challenges of recruiting caregivers but there are no details of how many the study tried to recruit.

Recommendations
This section mentions that 'strategies' are needed to reach caregivers who, for example, do not have a regular GP or who do not disclose their caregiving role. However, the paper does not deal with people in this situation and proposes no remedies to deal with people in these categories. Therefore I would leave this sentence out.

Also, the final sentence in the Recommendations mentions 'policy changes' needed but it is unclear what this means - what sort of policy changes would be of help here?

Minor Revisions

Last sentence of Procedure section mentions verbatim transcription by a 'stenographer' Is this the right word? (I thought a stenographer uses shorthand & a special machine?!) Would 'transcriber' be better.

I do not know what a 'peak body representative' is in Table 1; this needs more explanation.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests