Reviewer's report

Title: The Spiritual Distress Assessment Tool: An instrument to assess spirituality in hospitalised elderly persons

Version: 1 Date: 26 May 2010

Reviewer: Ching-Huey Chen

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
Yes, the study aims have been articulated in background section, fourth paragraph.
The implication of this research is significant.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
The instrument developing process is clearly addressed. The researchers used a systematic strategy and a group of experts to develop the spiritual distress assessment tool (SDAT) that strengthened the validity of this study. However, the concept of spirituality, spiritual distress, and spiritual needs were not clearly defined in the paper. In state of makes a hypothesis about spiritual distress, it would be more scientifically sound to do a 'concept analysis' to determine the definition and attributes of the spiritual distress. Methods section is also not clear. In the fist phase, the spiritual needs model was developed, the second phase was to develop the SDAT. Who conducted the spiritual need model in the hospital? Was there any guideline for conducting the spiritual need model to patients? How many elder patients participated? Patients' characteristics need to be addressed. Were there any terminal illness patients? To enhance quality of this paper, the above issues should be addressed. (Major Compulsory Revisions)

3. Are the data sound?
It would enhance the rigorous of this article if the researchers can provide evidence of content validity, such as content validity index (CVI). (Discretionary Revisions)

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
The methods section need more detail as previous suggested.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
In discussion section, how and why the dimensions of the spiritual needs discovered in this study differ from previous findings should be addressed. In first paragraph, line fifteen, the authors addressed that they were surprised chaplains did not challenge the assumption of spiritual distress of this paper and did not further explain why it is reasonable to accept the assumption. Based on the definition from previous study suggested (reference 14) that spiritual distress
may express in the loss of strength, hope, and meaning to life (the background section, second paragraph). Logically, the unmet spiritual needs will not absolutely lead to spiritual distress unless it causes the feeling of hopelessness or meaningless to life. More discussions are needed to address this ambiguity. (Major Compulsory Revisions)

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Yes, the limitations have been clearly addressed.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
The authors should compare the dimensions of the spiritual needs discovered in this study with previous studies and discuss reasons behind the differences.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes, the title and abstract manifest the findings of the study.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
The writing is logic, organized and concise.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.