Reviewer’s report

Title: Symptom burden in community-dwelling older people with multimorbidity: a cross-sectional study

Version: Date: 4 August 2014

Reviewer: Danijela Gnigidic

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this work. The paper addresses an important topic. Multi-morbidity and symptom burden are common in older people and have significant impact on overall health. Some aspects of the study methodology and results need to be clarified further.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Introduction
1) Would be good to provide data on multi-morbidity prevalence internationally.
2) Sections describing symptom burden should be more succinct.

Methods
3) Page 5, line 78 – please add city of recruitment.
4) Page 5, line 84 - please remove semicolon.
5) Should specify recruitment start and end date more clearly – e.g. day, month and year. Moreover, how was the data collected? Who performed the assessments?
6) Why was item on sexual activity excluded from the MSAS?
7) How was multi-morbidity defined in this study?
8) Have authors considered comparing frailty in this population since this data is available (as per ref 26)?

Results
9) Did symptom burden vary according to particular chronic diseases?
10) Overall, this section is very long. It’s rather uncommon to have 3 pages.

Discussion
11) Do you have information about treatment of symptoms? Multimorbidity often coexists with polypharmacy in older people and pharmacological treatment of one symptom may exacerbate another or a coexisting condition, which may explain the increase in symptoms in this population.
12) Page 13 - this study did not use data from a large dataset but rather a smaller RCT.
13) Are there other aspects of the RCT design that are relevant to the interpretation of the data? What was the intervention? Could this somewhat impact on the study findings?
14) Section on study strengths and limitations should be expanded to address potential confounding issues.

Conclusions
15) Clinical implications and implications for future work should be discussed.

Discretionary Revision Comments
16) Figure 1 could be removed.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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