Reviewer’s report

Title: Screening for Distress, the 6th Vital Sign: Common Problems in Cancer Outpatients Over One Year in Usual Care: Associations with Marital Status, Sex, and Age

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Reviewer: Wendy Wing Tak W Lam

Reviewer’s report:

This study investigated whether marital status, sex, age, and their interactions predicted trajectory of common practical and psychosocial problems over 12 months in a usual care sample of cancer outpatients. The manuscript is well-written and findings are interesting. On the other hand, I think some revision or additional information will make the paper more informative.

Introduction

There is no justification for the proposed hypotheses. For instance, it is unclear how the proposed interaction between age, marital status, and gender on needs in practical and psychosocial problems was derived. Please justify (1) why being in a relationship will buffer reports of practical and psychosocial problems, but lead to less awareness of and utilization of psychosocial services, (2) why there is an interaction between age, marital status and gender on needs in practical and psychosocial problems, as well as on awareness and utilization of services, but not on reports of problems.

Method

More information should be given regarding the measure “psychological screen for cancer”. Information regarding the validity and internal consistency of each of the measures should be given.

Please clarify whether hierarchical linear model was referred as Linear mixed effects model. Suggest using the terms consistently to minimize confusion.

Results

It is unclear whether the multivariate analyses adjusted for the effect of distress measured by distress thermometer, depression, and anxiety. Since the measures of distress were significantly associated with practical problems and psychosocial problems, their effect should be adjusted in the multivariate analyses.

For the secondary analysis, 95% CI should be included when reporting OR.

Discussion

Possible explanations should be given on why younger, single patients endorsed the most practical problems throughout the study whereas younger, female patients endorsed the most psychosocial problems throughout the study.

It is surprised to see young single men were more likely to use psychosocial
resources than young single women as studies often showed female patients were more likely to use psychosocial resources. Further elaboration should be given to explain the study findings. Moreover, did the study identify the types of psychosocial resources being used by the participants? It would be interesting to see what types of psychosocial resources being used by participants who are stratified by gender x martial status x age.

**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.