Reviewer's report

Title: Method of recruiting Victorian women with a primary invasive breast cancer to a cohort study of wellbeing

Version: 1 Date: 27 November 2007

Reviewer: Ann M Geiger

Reviewer's report:

General

This is a modestly interesting and unique report on an effort to conduct community-based recruitment for a prospective study of breast cancer survivorship. The manuscript is generally well-written; the following comments are offered to assist the authors in further strengthening the work.

On a positive note, Figure 1 is particularly useful and should not be modified or removed. In addition, the data on clinician contact results (page 14) is rarely reported and would be useful to others planning similar studies.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. The numbers of clinics participating and numbers of women approached are very hard to follow throughout the text. Moving some material, as described below in comments 7 and 8, might help. More importantly, a flow chart incorporating the two sources of recruitment and the number of women at each stage (eligible, consenting, replying, etc.) could be quite helpful.

2. Additional information on study participants versus all Victorian women diagnosed with breast cancer is essential. Age is presented in the text and in Table 2; this is helpful but insufficient. The authors present information in the text about metropolitan and county Victoria, and this should be incorporated into Table 2 and possibly the Abstract. More importantly, some indication(s) of tumor characteristics also should be presented in the abstract, text and Table 2. The best option would be to present some sort of tumor staging and a breakdown of types of treatment received; alternatives might be tumor size and hormone responsiveness. Characteristics of the tumor determine treatment, and both are important predictors of survivors' outcomes, so clearly this is vital information for anyone contemplating a similar study or reviewing the results of this study.

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

3. The overarching purpose of the cohort study seems somewhat diffuse as
described. The Abstract mentions physical, psychosocial and socioeconomic consequences, yet the Introduction goes on at length about hormonal treatments and their after effects. In the Methods there is mention of late treatment effects like recurrence, venous thromboembolism and fracture, implying more broad coverage of after effects. Given the purpose of this manuscript is to describe recruitment, a simple and succinct statement of the cohort study purpose should suffice. This statement should be consistently used throughout the manuscript.

4. The Abstract Conclusion notes a "high recruitment rate" yet no such rate is reported in the Results section of the Abstract, and a reader could disagree with the qualifier "high." The authors might simply report their numbers, and conclude that they were able to recruit from the community.

5. The Background section is much too long, and contains a substantial volume of information that does not seem directly pertinent to the manuscript. There is no need to describe breast cancer treatment in detail, nor is it appropriate to discuss community controls (page 6) given there is no mention of such controls in this study. A medium-length paragraph outlining unanswered questions about breast cancer survivorship should suffice as a foundation for this manuscript; these questions should match the succinct description of study aims mentioned in comment #1 above. The Background also should include a brief discussion of the public health literature on recruiting research participants from the community.

6. In the Results, on page 8, there are several exclusions from the study that seem like they should appear in Table 1. A reader skimming the paper and looking primarily at tables would otherwise miss these important details.

7. The material under Sample Size Calculation in the Methods (page 9) seems misplaced, and likely would fit better elsewhere. The description of the recruitment process, including numbers and cessation at 31 months, seems appropriate for the Results, while the impact on the cohort study should be incorporated into the Discussion.

8. The third paragraph of the results should come before the second (move from larger number of women to smaller numbers).

9. The Discussion is deficient in terms of addressing the impact of the costly and less-than anticipated recruitment on the cohort study (see comment #5 above). The Discussion also should more clearly note that a major limitation of community recruitment work like this is the inability to truly define a denominator and calculate a response rate.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

10. The material about centres participation in recruitment may fit better in the Results, as the flow may work well here in terms of describing the actual experience rather than what was originally planned.
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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.