Reviewer's report

Title: A qualitative exploration of Malaysian cancer patients' perceptions towards cancer screening

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Reviewer: sarah flanagan

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A qualitative exploration of Malaysians cancer patients' perceptions towards cancer screening

As the authors acknowledge, the perceptions and knowledge of cancer screening amongst cancer patients is an under researched area, and this study provides some insights into perceptions of screening amongst cancer patients. However, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed before publication could be recommended. Many issues relate to how the paper has been written (there are a number of grammatical errors) which impedes the reporting of the study findings. I have given some examples of these from the abstract and background (see below), and I would recommend that the whole paper is copy edited and proof-read to check for the kind of errors highlighted below before it could be considered for publication. I have also raised issues related to content, that also need to be addressed.

Major Compulsory revisions

The following are examples of the kinds of grammatical errors that appear throughout the paper.

Abstract

1. Results section line ‘awareness on cancer screening’ should read ‘awareness of cancer screening’.

2. Semi-colons should replace the commas between the four major themes identified.

3. Add ‘The’ to sentence beginning ‘Majority of the respondent and it should read ‘their diagnosis’ at end of same the sentence.

4. The following paragraph does not make sense as it stands ‘Some accounted of heeding mammogram..’ This needs rewording.

5. Add ‘the’ to phrase ‘including role of mass media’.

6. Conclusions paragraph - add in ‘of people’ in to phrase ‘personal experiences with cancer’.
Background

Again, there are a number of grammatical errors in the section that require attention:

1. Paragraph 1, sentence starting ‘The first NCR report.’ - does not make sense - needs re writing.

2. Paragraph 1, sentence starting ‘However, taking into account’ - add replace ’as’ with ‘that’.

3. In same paragraph/sentence - add ‘may be’ between ‘Malaysian expected’.

4. Paragraph 1, sentence starting with ‘Lifestyle factors..’ - add ‘a’ into ‘consumption of high fat diet’

5. Paragraph 1, sentence starting ‘The incidence of cervical cancer’ add ‘the’ into ‘among leading causes’.

6. Paragraph 1, sentence starting ‘Colon cancer is reported…’ - add semi-colon between ‘worldwide, this’.

7. Last sentence in paragraph doesn’t make sense as it stands. It should read for example ‘Among Malaysians, the highest incidence of colon cancer is found in the Chinese population, followed by the Malay and Indian populations’.

8. Paragraph 2, second sentence - ‘the’ needs adding to sentence - i.e. ‘Cancers of the breast’ and ‘are among the few cancers’.

9. Paragraph 2, second sentence - rephrase sentence ‘when probability of a cure is high’.

10. Paragraph 2, sentence beginning ‘The most known’ - ‘most known’ should read ‘foremost’

11. In the sentence beginning ‘The Health Belief Model (HBM)..’ - Remove ‘(HBM)’ as it has already been used as acronym I previous line.

Further major compulsory revisions (these are generally related to content)

Background

1. Statement in paragraph 1, beginning with ‘this may be in part due to environmental concerns...’ requires a reference.

2. Paragraph 2, second sentence - the authors need to say when free breast and cervical screening programmes were introduced in Malaysia.

3. Paragraph 2 - relating to ‘four major constructs’ of HBM needs to be explicit about what these are, rather than saying that ‘the first two refer to disease’ etc...

4. References required for line 15-16 pp5 in terms of ‘studies have evaluated
perceptions of health individual…’

Methods

Design and settings

1. This section would benefit from greater justification of utilising qualitative methods to answer the research questions.

Participants

2. I am troubled by the use of the ‘participants were selected’ - surely they weren’t selected, but invited to participate.

Study tool

1. References required for statement ‘interview guide was developed after extensive literature search’ as there are currently no references.

Interview process and data evaluation

1. This section needs clarification. It is unclear who was actually undertaking the interviews. The authors mention that research assistants were employed to ‘help’ in the interview.

2. I am unclear as to the process of data analysis - it needs to be more explicit.

3. I am confused by the use of the anticipated themes that were’ important to the researchers’ - surely the nature of qualitative research is to explore issues that are important to the participants.

4. Use of the ‘validity’ should replace the use of the term ‘trustworthiness’.

Results

As mentioned at the outset of the review, there are number of sentences that do not read correctly - grammar/vocabulary checks are required throughout.

1. Although the authors use quotations to support the emerging themes, there is only cursory interpretation of the responses. The section would benefit from more detailed interpretation of the responses.

2. The presentation of the results is confusing - for example, the statement ‘Male cancer patient who were aware of breast cancer screening, probably through television’, it is unclear if the researchers have made this assumption that it was ‘probably through television’ of if it is generated from the participant responses. This needs clarifying.

3. The first sentence in the last paragraph under the sub-heading ‘cue to action’ belongs in the discussion, and use of the term ‘needed to be addressed’ does not make sense.
Discussion

1. Again, this section requires substantial re-working. Paragraphs 3 and 4, for example, have a large number of grammatical errors, making it difficult to make sense of the points that the authors appear to be making. The section seems to be making claims that are not necessarily supported by the results reported in the results section.

Limitations

1. The authors need to explain why patients with cancer may have different perceptions/knowledge of cancer screening to those without cancer. They raise the point that focusing upon patients with cancer is a limitation, but do not explain why this may be the case.

2. They report that the lack of generalisability of the study is a limitation. However, qualitative studies are exploratory in nature and do not seek generalisability, so this is not a limitation of these kind of study.

Conclusions

1. The authors state that the ‘small sample size was due to the qualitative approach of the study’ - this kind of statement should belong in the limitations section. Having said this it is not a limitation as small samples are common in qualitative research, so this statement should be omitted.

This section is not worded appropriately - it should ‘recommend’ possible changes to practice, rather it uses terms like ‘should be’ e.g. ‘New venues for carrying out regular cancer screening should be initiated.’ This needs to be addressed.

Discretionary revisions

The authors may wish to add in a section relating to the strengths of the study.

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

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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