Reviewer's report

Title: Awareness of signs and symptoms of cancer and barriers to seeking medical help in Scottish adolescents: a cross-sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 16 September 2014

Reviewer: Lorna Fern

Reviewer's report:

General comments

This is a well written and structured paper and provides a valuable contribution to an important current debate on improving the diagnostic experience for young people with cancer.

Important details in this paper relate to differences in cancer awareness between groups and the influence of emotional barriers to seeking help for adolescents. Thus, for this age group in particular, educational cancer campaigns targeting only signs and symptoms only may not be sufficient to change healthcare seeking behaviour.

I have no major compulsory revisions but the discrepancy between figure 1 and the text in sample and setting needs to be clarified prior to publication.

Minor comments

Abstract

There is no mention in the introduction of the abstract or in the sentences which describe the purpose of the study (lines 59-63) that the paper focuses on adolescents. This should be inserted.

Introduction

Line 91: Reference 1, Viner et al., 2011 doesn’t specifically mention cancer deaths for teenagers and young adults. An alternative reference should be sourced; this data is available from the Office for National Statistics website.

Line 96: A sentence about survival rates for TYA would be helpful prior to the sentence about survival and early diagnosis.

Lines 180-185: Doesn’t mention the study is about adolescents, please insert.

Setting and sample

Line 197: states that nine schools informed the researcher they did not want to participate but the flow diagram in figure 1 states that 9 schools were excluded as pragmatic recruitment target of 20 schools. Please clarify.

Were there any similarities in the 9 schools who did not want to participate/were excluded?
Sample
Line 322: Insert ‘years’ after 12.4
Table 1: the first line of the table does not fit with the table headings. Age Mean (SD) 12.4 sits under a ‘%’ and (0.55) under ‘n’

Results
Well written and clear.

Discussion
Around lines 467-472 can the authors add a sentence or two acknowledging that the data collected is on 12/13 year olds and the age of patients referred to in the introduction is 15-24 years?

Not essential but the authors may want to consider emphasising the importance of teaching cancer awareness to young people in schools given the low awareness of cancer symptoms demonstrated here and the fact that current cancer awareness campaigns are mainly adult driven.

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest 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.