Reviewer's report

Title: Predictors of dying at home in patients receiving care from visiting nurses in Japan: Comparison of cancer and non-cancer patients

Version: 1 Date: 12 August 2010

Reviewer: Louise Peters

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Reviewer report for manuscript: Predictors of dying at home in patients receiving care from visiting nurses in Japan: Comparison of cancer and non-cancer patients

This is an important piece of work which adds to research conducted in this area. The quality of English is acceptable. The methods are appropriate. Regarding the statistical analysis - I am not an expert statistician but from my assessment the statistical analysis is appropriate.

I have made some suggestions for the Abstract. I am not sure about the word limit for the abstract however, my suggestions are mostly to do with moving sentences around or re-wording.

I feel the Introduction should be expanded and the aims of the study clearly articulated.

The Methods are appropriate. However, I have suggested putting in some headings to make it easier for the reader. Also, if there were any requirements for ethics approval, this should be stated. As noted above the design and analysis is appropriate.

The Results section is clear with just minor suggestions for improvement. The Tables were clearly presented.

In the Discussion the limitations are addressed; I have suggested adding as a limitation the large number of “unknown” responses.

Conclusions are satisfactory.

Outcome: Accept after minor essential revisions

Dr Louise Peters
12th August 2010

Detailed comments are given below:
Abstract - minor essential revisions
1. Introduction: First paragraph - second sentence to be moved to be the first
sentence and start with “In Japan, health policy ....etc” then follow with “To meet the needs .....etc”

2. Third sentence in same para reword as – “The objective of this study was to compare the factors ...etc”

3. Methods: Reword first sentence –“ A retrospective, national survey ........etc was carried out”.

4. Second sentence- add “during July to December 2004” at the end

5. Third sentence- Reword - “Logistic regression analysis was carried out to examine ....etc”

6. Results: Second sentence - add the words “in the selected period” after “died’

7. Third sentence – Instead of “severer” insert “greater”

8. Conclusion: Add - “to achieve this outcome where possible” to end of last sentence.

Introduction - Minor essential revisions

9. At the start of the introduction, I feel there should be a brief section which covers the international trends in relation to place of death – hospital versus home death. Then follow with “Past studies ...etc” I also think that this section on past studies needs to be expanded. What were the concerns of the dying patients and families in these studies? What were the findings? Reference #3 was a systematic review.

10. Study AIMS need to be included at the end of this section.

Design and measures - Minor essential revisions

11. Was ethics approval required for this study? A sentence would suffice in explanation.

12. Headings would make it much clearer for the reader eg: Design, Participants, Measures, Procedure, Analysis. Perhaps an overall heading of MEHOD for this section and followed by the sub headings of Design etc.

13. In the Design & measures section, 2nd paragraph, second sentence- (nurses had not asked about their preferences) – this sentence is unclear.

14. Still in this section- last para – what “state” was coded? Do you mean physical & mental state? This is not clear. Also, the word “they” is used. You are referring to the patient so you should make this clear.

15. Include some rationale for the sample size.

Statistical analysis - Minor essential revisions

16. Include a reference for the statistical analysis.

17. Response rate section – what are the 6 categories of ownership? Explain this.

18. Include an explanation on how the analysis for the comparison of the study sample with the national sample was carried out. The finding was no significant
differences between the study and national samples.

Results
19. First para – Include percentage of non-cancer deaths to all deaths? Minor essential revisions
20. Check for typos – should be Odds ratio. Minor essential revisions
21. Para 5, line 3 – insert “those” before “whose” Minor essential revisions
22. Para 6- First sentence. Reword as it does not read well - eg “but for cognition, non-cancer patients were likely to die at home.” Also, typo- “severe”.

Discussion
23. Para 1, line 6- check the % with Table data, for clinic based physicians for the cancer group. Minor essential revisions
24. Para 2, line7- delete “to” Minor essential revisions
25. Para 4 line 6 – use “comprised” instead of “composed”. Minor essential revisions
26. Last line in Para 4- last sentence is unclear – Is it the physician who is hospital based? You need to say this. Minor essential revisions
27. Para 4 line 7- Reword sentence to read “Whether the physician being hospital-based ....etc” Minor essential revisions
28. Under limitations – There was quite a large number in the “unknown” category for preference for the site of death, particularly, non-cancer patients. This needs to be included as a limitation. Minor essential revisions
29. The fact that home help services were not widely used by either the cancer or non cancer groups needs further exploration for the future in light of the severe physical and cognitive impairments. Discretionary revision
30. You could include as a recommendation - As patients/families can change their preference for place of death over time, a prospective study would capture this information. Patients may wish to die at home on initial entry to the community service but then may change their mind as the illness gets progressively worse. OR vice versa. As part of your recommendations you could also include the need for policy makers to support end-of-life care in the home. Discretionary revision

Conclusions
31. Add to end of last sentence - “to achieve this outcome where possible.”
Discretionary revision

Tables
32. Table 1- The title seems to me to be about patient characteristics rather than characteristics of the deaths. Consider: Characteristics of cancer and non-cancer VNS patients. Also, make sure the formatting for Table headings are clear, in particular, Tables 2 & 3. Minor essential revisions
References

Key words
34. Add to key words – dying at home Discretionary revision

35. Would the authors consider including the study questionnaire as an appendix? Discretionary revision

**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:**
NO to all of the above.