Reviewer's report

**Title:** Hope against hope: Exploring the hopes and challenges of rural female caregivers of persons with advanced cancer

**Version:** 3  **Date:** 3 June 2013

**Reviewer:** Paula P. C. Smith

**Reviewer's report:**

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   The exact question is not posed clearly in the paper although it is possible to infer the question from the background literature presented.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   The methods are described adequately. Table 1 is mentioned for a second time (first time in the data collection section see comments below). References are provided to support the analysis adopted. People unfamiliar with the narrative approach may require further detail of this process and the rationale.

3. Are the data sound?
   The data is presented as a narrative story from the participants. This is supported by an explanation of the themes that emerged and how the participants described these issues. The summarised narrative is presented in italic with some bold sections. I am not entirely sure what the significance of these bold sections is to the overall narrative or why they have been highlighted. Some further explanation of this may be helpful to the reader.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   Yes although see point above about the importance of highlighted sections.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   The discussion are well balanced and supported by the data presented and there is an acknowledgment by the authors of the limitations of the study.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   Yes.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   The authors clearly acknowledge the work which this study was based on and which guided the analysis of the narratives.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The title and abstract do convey most of what was found, although I am not sure how the rural aspect is covered other than that the participants were from rural communities. One of the claims in the abstract is that journaling may be particular useful for rural participants but this is not really well discussed in the discussion section and could be expanded on.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
Yes it is clear and generally well written and referenced except for a few areas that would benefit from further information or discussion. In the data collection section there appears to be a repeat of information about the average/mean age of participants. Also Table 1 does not give demographic information about the participants or more information ‘(about the participants descriptively)’ as suggested in the text.

Recommendation
• Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
Table 1 is mentioned twice and there should clearly be two tables presented. Only one is with the text so the other should be added and labelled appropriately. Otherwise the authors may like to consider expanding the discussion to take into account the reasons why they believe that journaling may be beneficial for the participant and why this is particularly useful for rural communities.

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

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.