Reviewer's report

Title: Meanings of existential uncertainty and certainty for people diagnosed with cancer and receiving palliative treatment: a lifeworld phenomenological study

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Reviewer: Stuart Milligan

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In the following list:
1a, 2, 5 & 8 are Minor Essential Revisions
1b, 1c, 3, 4, 6, 7 & 9-13 are Discretionary Revisions ("Minor issues not for publication)

Abstract

(1) Some issues with wording:
(1a) “Finitude” is not a word in common use in English. Would “mortality” be better?
(1b) The writers use the term “Gastro-intestinal” (which may be used to refer to the upper GI), but elsewhere, refer to “colorectal”. It is important to be consistent (and possibly use only one of these terms) to avoid confusing the reader.
(1c) Some sentences are not well constructed. For instance: “Healthcare professionals can try to support people with cancer and receive palliative treatment…” would be better “Healthcare professionals can try to support people receiving palliative treatment for cancer…” or “Healthcare professionals can try to support people with cancer who are receiving palliative treatment…”.

(2) Some statements are rather too sweeping. Unless all the respondents consistently demonstrated a particular effect (e.g. experiencing personal growth), I would advise the use of less definitive statements. E.g. instead of “Through their changed view of themselves and life they have experienced a personal growth.”, the following might be better “Through their changed view of themselves and life some respondents experienced personal growth.” Or “Through their changed view of themselves and life, personal growth could be experienced.”

Background

(3) Again, some rather sweeping sentences.
(4) Overall I find this section rather short and “lightweight”. I would have expected some counter-arguments or alternative explanations/paradigms to have been discussed.

Methods

(5) “Individuals who were too weak to participate in conversations were excluded”. Who deemed these people “too weak”? What criteria were used?
were any efforts made to ascertain whether the patients themselves felt strong enough? What might the impact of excluding these people have been on the findings?

results

(6) some statements are imprecise. for instance, “existential uncertainty and certainty appears to change life in a decisive way.” these things don’t change “life”. they may change the patient’s experience of life or perception of life or sense of value of life. it is important to be precise.

(7) grammar is inconsistent. in the sentence quoted above, “existential uncertainty and certainty” are plural and therefore should “appear to…” not “appears to…”. also, “being personally involved in planning important things for the future were described…” should read “being personally involved in planning important things for the future was described…”

(8) “fellowship” is not a word which is in common use in english these days, except with a religious connotation. companionship (or friendship) might be a better choice of word.

(9) some of the sentences do not read well. for instance “doing various activities in the natural environment were told to be associated with…” would be better expressed as “doing various activities in the natural environment were said to be associated with…” or “doing various activities in the natural environment were described as being associated with…”.

discussion

(10) as before, word choice is not always correct. for instance, “the narrative in itself has a healing power on the patient…” would be better written “the narrative in itself has a healing effect on the patient….”

(11) some words are missing. for instance, “the results reveal that when the participants talked about having functioning day – to – day routines, they experienced a basic sense of assurance which formed the prerequisite for transition from existential uncertainty to existential certainty” should probably read “the results reveal that when the participants talked about having functioning day – to – day routines, they experienced a basic sense of assurance which formed the prerequisite for transition from existential uncertainty to existential certainty”.

(12) “…the day – to - day mill of things” is not a phrase in use in english. better to use “…the day – to – day routine” or “…run of the mill things”.

(13) some grammatical errors are present. for instance “having needs or distress of other kind related to” should read “having needs or distresses of other kinds related to”. similarly, “…in order to ensuring well-being for the patient” should read “…in order to ensure well-being for the patient”. also, “thus, the present study contribute to and deepen the previous case study…” would be better worded as follows thus, the present study contributes to and deepens the previous case study…” (incidentally, this is a very long sentence and would benefit from being shortened).
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