Reviewer's report

Title: Feasibility of assessing quality of care at the end of life in two cluster trials using an after-death approach with multiple assessments.

Version: 2 Date: 24 February 2014

Reviewer: Suzanne Kite

Reviewer's report:

1. The authors clearly define two questions to be addressed by this study, and reflect this clearly in the title and abstract.

2. The methods are appropriate and well described. Justification is given for the retrospective nature of the study design. This is secondary analysis from two previously published cluster trials, and a concise and comprehensive summary of these two trials is included. Where the methodology draws on other previously published work, this is referenced.

3. The data is sound as presented. One of the original studies on which this study draws, the cluster randomised trial, was underpowered. However, for the purposes of the present study, this does not detract from the findings.

There are a few minor essential revisions only:

4. There are a couple of minor errors regarding the tables which need to be corrected: the median days between death and interview is recorded in table 2 not in table 1 (p14 2nd line); the p-value of 0.029 in table 2 is incorrectly positioned.

5. The paper is well-written, and follows an appropriate format. The discussion is well balanced and adequately supported by the data and by relevant references. Strengths and limitations are well outlined. However, the evidence presented regarding the distress caused to bereaved relatives, and the implications for the timing of interviews, does not substantiate the suggestion that the timeframe of 2-3 months needs to be amended, although it certainly requires further consideration and exploration. It is possible that such interviews will be distressing for families whatever the interval between bereavement and discussion.

6. In the introduction on p5, it would be helpful to clarify the use of the word subjective. Subjectivity in regard to patient experience is considered a strength (paragraph 3), but requires further definition and specificity in relation to the perspectives of proxies: see 4th paragraph, “There are worries that using proxy respondents may lessen the subjectivity and validity of data gathered when researching this phase”.

Minor editing is also required:
7. On p7, 2nd paragraph: some words are missing in the first sentence, and one of the references is not in numerical style.
8. Reference 14 on p26 is incomplete.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests