Reviewer's report

Title: Qualitative Inquiry: A Method for Validating Patient Perceptions of Palliative Care While Enrolled on a Cancer Clinical Trial

Version: 1
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Reviewer: Arif H. Kamal

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for allowing me to review your original research examining the patient perceptions of palliative care while enrolled on a cancer clinical trial.

I think overall this is a well-done study. But there remain several verbiage and messaging issues that seem to detract from the good work.

A few comments/suggestions:

1. The sentence, “Palliative care clinical trials (PCCT) are one approach to evaluate the quality of care in palliative care programs and can also serve to better understand how palliative care services can assist patients enrolled in a variety of biomedical clinical trials” is quite confusing. I’m not sure how clinical trials can evaluate quality of care. Further, I’m not sure that this generalization for “Palliative care clinical trials” is accurate, since most PC trials involve symptom management and not health service delivery.

2. Overall, the structure of the Introduction as one long paragraph is hard for the reader to digest. I would suggest breaking apart, likely into three paragraphs. Also, there is not natural progression of the argument that the reader can easily find. Is the paper about cancer treatment trials, palliative care clinical trials, palliative care services, or a combination? I had to read the Introduction several times to try to understand.

3. The second and fourth sentences are repetitive within the introduction.

4. I’m not sure that the average reader will understand that all patients seen at the NCI are enrolled in a cancer treatment trial.

5. It’s interesting to me that the authors stress the interdisciplinary and multi-domain nature of palliative care (the second sentence of the introduction), yet the scripted question calls the PC team the “Pain team”.

6. Can the authors describe how the 34 participants were selected?

7. Is there some foundational knowledge or heuristic that guided the investigators’ choosing of these two particular questions?

8. The discussion seems to leave the reader wanting to still know the answer, “Are patients more or less likely to complete the protocol…” There seems to be a disconnect between the scripted question (which seems to imply a Yes/No answer) and the thematic analysis, which seems to answer the question “What characteristics predict…”
9. Overall, the verbiage around a “trial within a trial” is quite confusing. Sounds like you have delivery of usual palliative care services, which are provisioned by a clinical trial, for cancer patients who are on a cancer treatment clinical trial. I’m not sure how the PC clinical trial was any different than a PC consultation for those patients who are already on a cancer trial.

**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