Reviewer's report

Title: Factors associated with multiple transitions in care during the end of life following enrollment in a comprehensive palliative care program

Version: 1 Date: 8 March 2006

Reviewer: Irene J Higginson

Reviewer's report:

This paper appears to be a further publication from the stable of work published by the group, building from the interesting and valuable paper they published in BMC Palliative Care in 2005; 4:3. There are some areas of overlap with this already published paper, particularly in the methods, results – see for example table 1 and figure 1 - and even within the background and discussion (e.g points about transitions being stressful / causing anxiety). The authors need to remove the overlaps as readers will not wish to read the same information twice. They should also acknowledge the prior publication of their work in BMC Palliative Care, and give reference to that.

The main new material in this paper appears to be the analysis of factors association with transitions for patients within the palliative care service. For this a limited number of factors were associated with increased transitions.

Some factors that the authors need to consider in greater depth are:

1. Data source. They included only those patients who were in receipt of palliative care services in their area, and therefore it the results are not likely to be generalisable to other groups. Also the team may have acted to reduce transitions.
2. How accurately were the number of transitions linked to the time period in care. Are the authors sure that the greater number of transitions for some patients was not because they cared for those patients longer?
3. Given the very skewed distribution of the number of transitions this is a difficult analysis. How have the authors accounted for this distribution?
4. The authors have focussed primarily on univariate rather than multivariate analysis. Many variables, e.g. age and diagnosis, are inter-related and a multivariate analysis would indicate the most important variables. It would also mitigate the problem of multiple statistical tests, which with a p level set at 0.05, would mean that 1 test in 20 would be significant by chance.
5. The results appear to be relevant to the literature on factors affecting place of death, and the authors should discuss this, relating their findings to that published in BMC Palliative Care and elsewhere.

In conclusion, this is a potentially interesting analysis but has areas of overlap with a previous publication in this journal, and I feel would benefit from some further analysis and consideration of literature and limitations before publication.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interests