Reviewer's report

Title: In the shadow of bad messages - Reactions of patients with acute leukaemia, myeloma or lung cancer to bad messages in different phases of their disease.

Version: 1 Date: 12 July 2006

Reviewer: Patricia A parker

Reviewer's report:

General

1. This is an interesting study and addresses an important topic. More studies are needed to better understand how patients understand their illness and how this may change over time.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. The description of several aspects of the methodology and statistical plan is incomplete. This includes information on patient eligibility (e.g., were all patients newly diagnosed, how far from diagnosis, was it before or after treatment, etc.) and patient recruitment (e.g., were participants recruited in person during medical visits, over the telephone, etc.) In addition, it is unclear what criteria were used to determine when patients were interviewed, why some patients have more interviews than others, etc.). The interview process and questions require more description (e.g., what types of prompts were used, what types of questions were asked at the follow-up interviews), were interviews transcribed verbatim, and were they checked for accuracy.

2. More information is needed regarding the participants. Information regarding demographic (e.g., age, gender, education) and disease- and treatment-related (time since diagnosis, current and previous treatments, recurrence status, etc.) characteristics is needed. How many patients died during the course of the study? How was it determined if someone â€œrecoveredâ€? How many patients refused or were unable to complete follow-ups?

3. More information about how the coding categories were created is needed. The coding categories are somewhat ambiguous and some do not seem to match the content described. The individual patient statements are not brought together in a cohesive way so it is difficult to draw conclusions from the data.

4. How was it determined whether someone had recovered, was in the terminal phase, etc.

5. The conclusions and practice implications appear to go beyond the data.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.