Reviewer's report

Title: In the shadow of bad news - Views of patients with acute leukaemia, myeloma or lung cancer about information, from diagnosis to cure or death.

Version: 4 Date: 6 October 2006

Reviewer: Patricia A parker

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors appear to have considered the suggestions that were raised in the previous review and have made minor modifications to the manuscript. However, there continue to be some areas of the manuscript that are awkward and unclear and several issues raised by the previous reviewers did not appear to be fully addressed.

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

1. The identified categories continue to be somewhat ambiguous and some do not seem to match the content described. For example, it is not very clear what the difference is between “information-dependent” and “medically fully informed.” The description and the examples from the patients' comments seem quite similar. It is not clear to this reviewer whether these categories represent meaningful differences in patients' information needs/styles.

2. More information regarding the participants (e.g., age, gender, education) and disease- and treatment-related (time since diagnosis, current and previous treatments, recurrence status, etc.) characteristics is now provided. However, it is suggested that the authors consider how some of these characteristics might influence the patients' perspectives.

3. It would be preferable to have the description about the coding process (e.g., having another reader review the transcripts and interpretations) in the methods' since this is part of the methodology rather than describing it solely in the discussion.

4. It is helpful to see the number of interviews for each of the participants. There is such a wide range of the number of interviews for the participants in the diagnosis/treatment 1 phase. However, there is no information/discussion in the paper about how the interviews may have changed over time (within the diagnosis/treatment 1 phase). It seems that someone who has been interviewed 11 times might express different reactions toward their disease and it would be useful to consider how the number of times participants were interviewed might affect their perceptions.

5. The conclusions 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)

It seems unnecessary to include the statements regarding coping and Lazarus and Folkman. The main content of the manuscript does not address coping per se and, therefore, it might be better to focus on the topics of breaking bad news, reactions to diagnosis, etc.

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.