Reviewer's report

Title: Caregivers' active role in palliative home care - to encourage or to dissuade? A qualitative descriptive study

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Reviewer: Sheila Payne

Reviewer's report:

This paper reports the results of a small descriptive study of family caregivers of cancer patients, who are cared for at home in Denmark. The authors argue that the experiences of family care givers caring for a family member at home have been relatively neglected in the literature. While there is some evidence for this, there has been a body of knowledge focused on the experiences of family carers predominantly from Australia, Canada and the UK. There are now many small scale descriptive studies. However, the authors have sought to illuminate the impact of carer's direct involvement in patient care at home during the dying period, and this is potentially useful as policy drivers in many European countries seek to increase home death rates, with often scant regard to the impact on family carers.

There are a number of limitations to the research that need addressing:

• Sampling – it appears (only in the Discussion) that some of the participants were selected from patients under the care of their own GP. Therefore the researchers have a pre-existing relationship with these families. There is a potential for bias which should be discussed.

• Claims for the research – the study offers a retrospective account of care giving from a very small group of seven bereaved carers. The analysis is presented in descriptive terms. I therefore think it is not justified to make claims that 'active involvement in palliative care has a positive effect on bereavement' (Discussion). There were no measures of bereavement outcome, participants varied in the time since bereavement (1-3 years) and there is no comparison group. A more nuanced and contextualised account is required that acknowledges that these are self-reports from a small group.

Otherwise the paper is well written. There is a typographical error on Table 1 – pancreatic cancer.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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'