Reviewer's report

Title: General Practitioners' use and experiences of palliative care services: a survey in South East England.

Version: 1 Date: 14 April 2008

Reviewer: Stephen Barclay

Reviewer's report:

I read this paper with interest - the relationship between GPs and specialist palliative care services is indeed of great interest. I have the following comments to make.

The comparisons between hospices A and B add a level of complexity to the paper that I am unsure is needed - I found it confusing at times. Is the focus of the paper on GP / specialist relationships or on the two hospices? If the latter then we need a lot more information about the two hospices to put the differences into context. If the former, which I suspect is the true focus, then I suggest the differences between the two hospices are not included in the paper.

It would be helpful to have more of a breakdown of the numbers of patients GP reported caring for. Worth emphasising the self-report nature of all these data. The average GP has 5 cancer deaths every year and 15 non-cancer deaths - these GPs would have had an average of 3.6 cancer deaths a year from the mortality data the authors supply.

What about the non-cancer deaths? Of the patients the GPs recognised themselves as providing palliative care for, they estimated 3/4 needed specialist input, but how many of their patients died without ever being so recognised, especially non-cancer patients? I am aware that the authors do not have these data, but these issues need to be included in the discussion.

There is a helpful section about response rates (well done!!) and non-response bias. I wonder if men look after more patients than women because women GPs are more often part-time? Similarly, older GPs may be more likely to work part time.

The Haines paper has no reference at the end. Several of the references are a little old now - there is more recent literature that the authors might helpfully cite

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare I have no competing interests