Reviewer's report

Title: Bereavement help-seeking following an 'expected' death: a cross-sectional randomised population survey.

Version: 1 Date: 1 July 2008

Reviewer: Peter Strang

Reviewer's report:

This is a well-written paper but there are a few things I would like to comment on:

1. The paper aims to be a “whole-of-population” study, but still 83 % of the deceased had a cancer diagnosis, which seems like a substantial over-representation (in Sweden only about 25% of all deaths are due to cancer).

The authors should discuss why this is so – due to sampling?
They should also discuss that therefore these data mainly are related to cancer deaths. The needs may be different e.g. in deaths due to stroke or dementia.

2. The other issue is that the average age was only 45.3 years.
In a Swedish population the typical age of the bereaved would be much higher as the closest relative often is a spouse.

The authors should discuss a bit more about the impact of age: the span was 15 years to 92 years. Probably, the needs are much different in people aged 15-20 years, than in people aged 80-90 years.

3. The logistic regression model was only able to account for 22% of the variance. The authors should discuss this a bit more.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
YES

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
YES

3. Are the data sound?
YES, but see my general comments above

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data
deposition?
YES

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
YES, but see my general comments above

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Partly but see my general comments above

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
YES

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
YES

9. Is the writing acceptable?
YES

Please make your review as constructive and detailed as possible in your comments so that authors have the opportunity to overcome any serious deficiencies that you find and please also divide your comments into the following categories:

- Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)
- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

MAJOR REVISIONS (not necessarily long text segments, but targeted answers to my questions)

Major Compulsory Revisions
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What next?

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Based on your assessment of the validity of the manuscript, what do you advise should be the next step?

- Accept without revision
- Accept after discretionary revisions (which the authors can choose to ignore)
- Accept after minor essential revisions (which the authors can be trusted to make)

ACCEPT after REVISION

- Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions
- Reject because scientifically unsound
- Reject because too small an advance to publish (note that BMC Palliative Care will publish all sound studies including sound negative studies)

Level of interest

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BMC Palliative Care has a policy of publishing all scientifically sound research whatever its level of interest. However if you
choose one of the first three categories below, we may ask the authors if they would like the manuscript considered instead for the more selective journal BMC Medicine.

- An exceptional article (of the kind that might have warranted publication in such journals as Nature, Cell, Science, New England Journal of Medicine, British Medical Journal)

- An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English
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As we do not charge for access to published research, we cannot undertake the costs of editing. If the language is a serious impediment to understanding, you should choose the first option below, and we will ask the authors to seek help. If the language is generally acceptable but has specific problems, some or all of which you have noted, choose the second option.

- Acceptable

Statistical review
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Is it essential that this manuscript be seen by an expert statistician?
If you feel that the manuscript needs to be seen by a statistician, but are unable to assess it yourself then please could you suggest alternative experts in your confidential comments to the editors.

- No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

I DECLARE THAT I HAVE NO COMPETING INTERESTS