Reviewer's report

Title: Information by physician and retention of information by patients - Obstacles to the awareness of patients of progressing disease when life is near to an end.

Version: 3 Date: 20 November 2007

Reviewer: Marjorie Wenrich

Reviewer's report:

General

It is very difficult to read this manuscript because of language issues.

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

The sample size is too small to lead to the types of conclusions that the authors came to. There were only seven patients who made it beyond interview A. The four categories defined in the results therefore refer to the experiences of seven patients. Other comments:

1) what is meant by the term "awareness"? prognosis? If so, it should be stated as such. Awareness can mean many things, as can information.

2) in qualitative research, the purpose is not to describe interpret and clarify experiences and arguments but to elucidate themes.

3) I believe that these authors published a previous manuscript from the same study, and parts of this manuscript are almost verbatim from that paper. Perhaps the authors should just reference that paper for details.

4) recruitment: who did the recruitment? What number of subjects were you attempting to identify? How did you decide on the numbers you arrived at? What was the mean number of minutes per initial and follow-up interview? How was the study described/represented to subjects?

4) The first interview was held from six days to six weeks--a long period of time. What differences might you expect based on that variability? What differences might you expect between patients with a solid versus hematologic cancer?

5) How many coders were there? How did you assess interrater reliability?

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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)

**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:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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