Reviewer's report

Title: Associations between successful palliative cancer pathways and community nurse involvement

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Reviewer: Geoffrey Mitchell

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper, which asks a pertinent question - whether the involvement of a community nurse in a patient's palliative care improves outcomes. I would like to see the paper published, but I have several issues which need to be addressed before this should happen.

Major compulsory revision; or explanation to the journal why the revision is not necessary.

The first is what is a successful palliative care pathway? It is not spelt out just what this means, but this is the primary outcome measure of the project. I understand what is meant is a loose term to describe a mapping of the services that were utilised by the patient during their final days. Is a pathway considered to be present only when the CN is involved, or can a pathway exist without CN involvement?

Secondly, I am not at all clear as to the status of patients who died in nursing homes. The paper states that patients in care homes do not have CN involvement (p9 para 1). These are included as non-responders. However, should they not be excluded from any analysis? Subsequent analysis that shows statistically significant association between CN involvement are self-evident and should not be in the paper (esp CN contact with relatives was lower in patients who died in nursing homes - this will of course be the case if the CN has nothing to do with them)

Minor essential revision

The questionnaires clearly have a lot of detail in them which has not been elaborated on in the paper - 60+ and 70+ item questionnaires clearly explored a lot of issues, but the reporting brought these down to relatives' reporting of whether the palliative care pathway met their's and the patients' needs and expectations. I think the paper needs considerably more detail about the content of the questionnaire.

Discretionary revision

There are several minor changes in English expression which would improve the paper, but overall the quality of writing is on the whole very good. I would suggest asking a native English speaker to review the paper.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests