Reviewer's report

Title: Dying, death and bereavement: a qualitative study of the views of carers of older people with heart failure in the UK.

Version: 1 Date: 1 October 2008

Reviewer: Catherine Exley

Reviewer's report:

This paper pertains to a relatively neglected area of research. The authors describe the methods adequately, and present some interesting data. The writing is of an acceptable standard. However, the paper is very long, and whilst this isn't a problem per se for the this journal, the authors may wish to consider how they could edit their paper to make it more focused and succinct.

Major compulsory revisions:

Title/aim: This is an ambitious paper which seeks to cover three things: 1) experience of caring for someone with non-malignant disease at the end of life; 2) carers’ bereavement experiences 3) implications for ‘policy’ in terms of ‘what is a good death for people with heart failure’ and finally the implications for primary care. As a result it is a very long and at times seems to lack focus. At the very least the title and introductory sections should be revised to more accurately reflect the aims of the paper, which seems to be to consider what messages the experiences of carers has for GPs providing care at the end of life.

Literature: The literature cited should be expanded. There are other published works examining the experiences of experiences of those living with, and caring for people, with non-malignant disease at the end of life which may enhance the paper. Certainly, some of the themes explored echo/reaffirm other published work, and the authors may find it useful to refer to this in their discussion. The paper ends with implications for primary care, and yet does not engage earlier with other research examining the provision end of life care in the community.

Over generalised statements: The paper includes some sweeping generalisations which need consideration: e.g. P24 “At the very least participants would have like to receive a letter of condolence from their GP” – was this a question people could respond to with a ‘yes or no’ or did every respondent spontaneously mention this? P27 “We know that the sorts of advance discussion and directions that are required to ensure this are not often begun” - evidence?

Minor revisions:

Grammar/Spelling: There are some grammatical/spelling errors in the paper– the use of apostrophes where plurals are needed seems to be a particular problem.

Discussion: The discussion, as it is currently presented, is very broad, and seeks to cover a range of different issues: improving carer experiences, the ‘good
death', advanced care planning and implications for primary care. It may be useful to cover one or two of these in more detail.

Discretionary revisions:
The paper is very long, and whilst the data are indeed interesting, some sections could have fewer quotes (there is currently a discrepancy between each 'sub-theme). More generally, editing the paper to make it more succinct, would make the argument more compelling.

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

**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