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.

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Reviewer: Richard Harding

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Manuscript Review

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

For: BioMed Central Palliative Care
Manuscript ID: 1772405063221517

General

This manuscript addresses 2 important areas: non-cancer palliative care and caregivers. There is currently very little data on heart failure in the context of palliative care.

Major Compulsory Revisions

From the fourth sentence onward of the background, the structure is very unusual in that the opening of the paper discusses the results. This makes for difficult reading- we know what is found in the background before we have been told about the study.

The introduction is overly long at 3.5 pages and omits key literature of carers / heart failure in palliative care. There is a lit on heart failure in palliative care that needs to be reviewed to show that this study is substantive.

Page 7 – Under methods, statements of Aims and Design are missing.

Discussion

A reluctance to discuss end of life wishes between family carers and people with heart failure is already reported JPSM 2008, 36 (2): 149-156. It would be good to have a fuller grasp on the heart failure literature. Moreover, if the constructs of the good death presented here are so different then this must be situated in the evidence – don’t cancer patients want a home death too?

The main substantive contribution of this study is felt to be better reflected by the statement in the third paragraph (widespread rejection by carers of what are seen as futile interventions etc).

The final paragraph: discussion of the limitations of this study is too brief and the
use of the word ‘significant’ is questioned. The aim of the study also appears to change again in the last sentence, i.e. a focus on bereavement not mentioned elsewhere in aims/design.

Minor Compulsory Revisions

The abstract could usefully state the aim of the study.

Page 2 – second sentence in ‘Results’ section of Abstract; grammatical error - carer’s should be carers. (Same mistake is made on Pages 15, 18)

Page 3 – first sentence of ‘Conclusions’ section of Abstract; the statement referring to the sorts of care people with HF want as they approach death is different to that set out in the results (discussions about end of life). It would be helpful to make sure the discussion ties up closely with the results.

The third sentence needs clarifying and is also not found in the results.

Page 4 – third sentence in ‘Background’: repetition (shaped the conceptual framework).

Page 6 – last sentence of third paragraph of ‘Background’: Is the fact of carers being older and having co-morbidities not as true for cancer?

Page 7 – There is existing literature on this lack of identification with the label of ‘carer’ which should be cited.

Page 8 – end of first paragraph: Figures require explanation; 44 out of 542 participants?

Under ‘Data collection and analysis’ sub-section it is stated that 20 participants were ‘self-selected’ – what bias does this bring?

The last sentence on this page refers to two members of the research team reviewing the transcripts – who exactly? And how were the transcripts reviewed?

Page 9 – End of ‘Data collection and analysis’ section: was only the coding frame agreed or was the application of the frame reviewed?

Results

Page 9 - First two paragraphs: which regions were the 20 participants from? And what is the recall bias in this design?

Page 10 – End of second paragraph of ‘Results’: how many were receiving palliative care?

Discussion

Page 25 – first sentence: isn’t this study more about carers than people with heart failure?

Second sentence: what does ‘a numerically significant group’ mean?

Last sentence of first paragraph: the aims need to be much clearer
Second paragraph: what is the age difference referred to?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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.