Reviewer's report

Title: Time to Decide: Risk-Reducing Mastectomy and BRCA1/2 Gene Mutation Carriers

Version: 1 Date: 10 October 2006

Reviewer: Bettina Mesier

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript describes a qualitative study of the experiences of three women of are carriers of a BRCA1/2 mutation and are considering prophylactic mastectomy. Data were collected as part a pilot study that assessed a new decision support strategy aimed at women considering prophylactic mastectomy. The topic of the manuscript is important, given the data that have become available recently that demonstrate the efficacy of prophylactic mastectomy in reducing breast cancer risk amongst women from families at high risk of developing breast/ovarian cancer. The authors correctly state that few data are currently available on the efficacy of decision support strategies aimed at this group of women.

The manuscript is clearly structured, well written and appropriately referenced. It does however have severa shortcomings in particular with regard to the justification and description of the research methodology chosen. The authors fail to provide a rationale for the mixed methodology that was chosen. Also, while the three case descriptions may be adequate for a case report, it is unlikely that informational redundancy was achieved, which is generally used in qualitative studies as a guide to the required sample size. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis should be described in more detail, for example whether the interviews were transcribed, whether a particular analytic framework was used to guide the analysis etc. Given the very small sample size, the meaningfulness of the results using quantitative measures is limited; in particular the authors at times appear to over-interpret the significance of the meaning of the findings using these measures, for example on page 9, were explicit reference is made to one of the participant’s baseline knowledge and decisional conflict scores.

Over all this paper makes interesting reading. However, it may be more appropriate to submit the manuscript as a case report, rather than an original research support, given the limitations of the methodology that was employed and the sample size in particular.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.