Reviewer's report

Title: Complementary therapy use among breast cancer patients during chemotherapy

Version: 1 Date: 16 June 2014

Reviewer: Wolfgang Marx

Reviewer's report:

The authors have conducted an interesting study that explores a topical issue in a unique population. The sample size of this study is a particular strength.

Major concerns

My major concern is the inclusion of prayer as a CAM therapy significantly affects the results of this study by potentially inflating the number of reported CAM users and potentially altering the associations. To this point, I recommend the following actions

• The authors should include a justification, either in the introduction or discussion, for why prayer was listed as a complementary therapy or include it as a potential confounder.
• The abstract should note the percentage of CAM users with and without prayer included in the analysis.
• Statistical analysis with and without prayer included would be a valuable inclusion

Here are two good discussions on this point:

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3004781/

Other major concerns are:

• It was concluded that “As many perceived MBP as useful, perhaps it should be recommended as supportive therapy for a more holistically integrated approach to health care.” This conclusion is unjustified based on the data presented in the current study. Although patients may rate CAM therapies as useful, this is not a sufficient justification for changing clinical practice in the way that is suggested in this conclusion.

• In the discussion it was stated that “Prayer is an essential component of health and wellbeing that can enhance patients’ hopes and expectations. It often comes into sharper focus in times of crisis, illness, or suffering. In short, prayer may invoke a relaxation response, which in turn may positively impact health.” I feel as though this is more the opinion of the authors rather than an evidence-based report and should be either reworded to reflect the current literature or removed from the manuscript
Minor concerns

• In the discussion it was stated that “The popularity of performing prayer is likely associated with the fact that the majority of the participants were Malay. As all Malays in Malaysia are Muslim and obligated to perform their prayers five times a day, prayer is an action that Malay breast cancer patients are likely to continue to routinely perform during chemotherapy.” This needs to be referenced.

• In the abstract, the term is Complementary therapies (with an E), not complimentary therapies (with an I).

• Some of the phrasing sounds somewhat informal and should be reworded. (e.g. “literally be a matter of life and death”, “topped the ranking”, “cannot be underestimated”)

• List major reasons for excluded participants

• Was pilot study published? If so, insert a reference

• More detail of the interview process are required in the methodology section.

• Include the US dollar equivalent for RM3000 as this will help international readers understand this number. Furthermore, why was this distinction made?

• In the inclusion criteria, it was stated that “breast cancer patients who had undergone at least one cycle of adjuvant chemotherapy and were commencing their second chemotherapy cycle” yet the results indicate that you included patients on their 3rd and 4th cycle. Could you please clarify this.

• In the discussion, it was stated that “This enlightens us that the faith patients have in traditional healers may play a role in healing that cannot be underestimated.” Could you please rephrase this as the meaning was unclear to me.

Discretionary suggestions

• The submission of the questionnaires used would be useful for further studies in this area.

• Some greater discussion on how this compares to international studies would improve the discussion section of this paper.

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests