Reviewer’s report

Title: Measuring Dementia Carers’ Unmet Need for Services - an exploratory mixed method study

Version: 1 Date: 3 March 2010

Reviewer: Richard Kaczynski

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This is a well written article on an important facet of caring for dementia patients. It provides a clear description of the research question, methodology and instruments used (although a little more detail on the qualitative interview would have been nice). There are, however, a few areas which raise questions:

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Why was Spearman’s rho used in favor of Pearson correlations? Was this due to the sample size, some concern that the scales were not normally distributed, or that the scales did not otherwise meet the assumptions for an interval-level variable? It seems odd to present Spearman’s rho throughout then finish with linear regression.

2. In Table 2, GHQ-30 looks positively skewed (mean=8, SD=7), as do all the “services provided.” Tying this in to Figure 1: Is there a concern that the skewness of “in home respite” (mean=29, SD=34) could be providing a misleading R, or violating distributional assumptions for this procedure?

- Minor Essential Revisions

3. Although four caregiver-patient dyads did not consent to the study, were any data available to examine differences between these four and the 20 who did consent? (Disregard if no data are available.)

4. There are several typos: Put an = sign after r2 on pages 12 and 13. Table 2 is missing the +/- sign for CCL-CR and CCL-Financial burden. Change “CCL-Overall burden” to “CCL-Overall burden.”

5. p. 16, Discussion: “This means that relying just on extensive assessments of the status of PWD and carer burden may inadvertently exclude those genuinely needing services.” Is the word “extensive” correct? Sounds like it should be something like “objective” (i.e., it overlooks subjective experiences like felt need), but I could be wrong.

6. Sample selection: This is a convenience sample drawn from 24 carers “known to the local Alzheimer’s Australia organization.” This sampling strategy calls into question the generalizability of these findings, which is acknowledged at the very end of the discussion section. However, the closing paragraph of the discussion almost sounds like the author is saying that the strength of the triangulated
methodology overcomes whatever weaknesses stem from using a small convenience sample. I don’t think this is what the authors intended, but linking these unrelated issues in the same paragraph could give readers that impression.

- Discretionary Revisions

7. The question of the sample’s representativeness is also addressed in the beginning of the discussion section, where a national report is cited [22]. Would be practical to add a column to Table 1 giving national figures for these demographics? That way, readers could see how close the numbers were or, where different (for instance, where males were under-represented), by how much. This would go a long way toward addressing concerns about representativeness.

8. There are enough variables for which Rho is reported is that I wonder if a correlation matrix might make for a helpful Table 3. I found myself wanting to see all these correlations in one place.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I have no competing interests.