Author's response to reviews

Title: "Done more for me in a fortnight than anybody done in all me life." How welfare rights advice can help people cope with cancer.

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear BMC Health Services Research

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to these reviewer’s comments. We enclose two revised versions of the manuscript, one with track changes and one without. Below, we outline our considered response to the reviewer’s comments.

1. In response to the other Reviewer, authors point: “The purpose of the paper is not to document the prevalence of financial strain …, but to describe the impact of the service on the lives of those dealing with cancer”. This is also very well reflected in the title. Therefore, what is the need for the section “Impact of cancer on finance”. As I mentioned before, most of these issues are documented in the literature, and have been reviewed by the authors in the “Background”. The reason given by the authors for maintaining this section does not make sense to me.

Our response:-
While there is some literature concerning the impact of cancer on finance which we refer to in the background and discussion, we believe that including this section provides essential context for the other sections of the paper, as well as reinforcing the importance of this generally neglected element of cancer. Moreover, this section provides graphic illustrations of the experiences of people with cancer that is useful for readers who are not familiar with this topic.

2. The justification for the sample size of 22 is not convincing; if these were interim findings, why reporting them now? Authors should provide a better reason for that.

Our response:-
Although this paper reports on interim findings and is based on a sample size of 22, we reached data saturation in the categories presented in this paper. We have included a phrase to this effect (p10, para 2). Categories that had not reached data saturation are not reported in this paper.

3. The impact of the service on the psychological state of participants – As I mentioned before, this is one of the strongest measures of the impact of this service. At least this should have been mentioned in the Discussion as a recommendation for further research.

Our response:-
We now include the psychological impact of dealing with the stresses of cancer as a recommendation for further research (p27, para 2)

4. The quality of the Discussion chapter – Authors have done well by discussing their findings with previous evidence. However, it is still not strong enough; based on their experience of running this new service it would be of great importance to address some of the following issues:
   • What is the lesson from this exercise to be used in order to expand this service further?
• Very few participants were referred by NHS health professionals (apart from Macmillan nurses) – how to improve the engagement of these professionals with helping patients coping with these problems?
• What is the best time to assess patients re their finances?
• Etc.

Our response:-

We are mindful of the importance of these issues. However, some of these issues are beyond the scope of this paper and we will address many of these concerns in future publications from this study. However, we believe that the discussion as it is currently structured addresses the issue of the best time to assess patients re their finances as we state on p 26 para 2, that there is ‘no ‘one size fits all’ remedy to this problem. The remainder of this paragraph discusses the importance of welfare rights services in enabling the issue of finance to be raised with cancer patients in the knowledge that they can onward refer to appropriate services.

Thank you for providing us the opportunity to respond to these comments. We have addressed those that could be and pointed out those that will be addressed in future publications.

We look forward to hearing from you about this matter.

Yours sincerely

Suzanne Moffatt