Reviewer's report

Title: The relationship between service quality measures and patient willingness to recommend at a national oncology provider network

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Reviewer: Anna Gagliardi

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Measurement of health system performance, particularly from the perspective of patients is an important health services research issue. Decades of research on performance measurement shows it to have little impact on physician or patient behavior, and limited impact on manager behavior. In general we have little guidance on how to measure and report system performance. So patient willingness to recommend may be an important way to gauge system performance. Thus this paper addresses an important issue, but the findings could be better reported if the authors elaborated on this context for naïve readers, provided information on what informed survey development/inclusion of measured elements including theoretical framework, and then elaborated on the implications of the findings.

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS

BACKGROUND

First paragraph – elaborate on how patients perceive quality, and clarify that the setting of interest is acute care (ie. hospitals)

Second paragraph – there are no references/citations to support the discussion of performance measurement in oncology; should cancer patients be surveyed regularly – is this feasible/practical/warranted according to current research?; and evaluation of service quality by the variety of method noted is not specific to oncology, these methods are applied in multiple sectors; service quality surveys are linked with willingness to recommend – clarify whether this means administration of the surveys, or specific survey findings

Paragraph three – there is no reference/citations to support the first sentence; is it likely that in countries where performance is not monitored/reported that patients have a choice of service provider?; the objective of this study requires further justification – would cancer patients differ from other patients in which willingness to recommend has been studied? Why would it be important to study this in a heterogeneous sample? Clarify whether the intent is to assess perceived quality or measured quality

Overall, the findings might be more broadly relevant if the authors noted the limitations of measuring and reporting performance data, either publicly or through other mechanisms such as audit and feedback, to highlight why it is
instead important to be able to measure and address a patient reported outcome like willingness to recommend, and comment on whether and how this measure is currently reporting in oncology or other type of health system report card.

METHODS

Approach – particularly because the authors have chosen to develop their own instrument rather than using a validated survey, the survey approach should be noted and cited. For example, it is reasonable to not use a validated survey if the intent of the survey is exploratory or descriptive rather than hypothesis testing. It is important to situate the dimensions included in the survey with research and theory so that readers understand what informed survey development – to strengthen the study perhaps a patient focused conceptual framework describing how satisfaction is linked with different service dimensions could be described

Statistical analysis – why were results dichotomized and why these two categories (top response versus all others)? Where did these service quality items come from – perhaps they could be defined, if not in the text, then in a table?

DISCUSSION

Elaborate on implications for practice or policy – how can these findings be applied by hospital managers or those who fund hospitals or those who independently monitor quality of care delivery?

Elaborate on additional research that would be directly informed by the findings – for example, since involvement in decision making and sense of well being are important to cancer patients, what research has been done that characterizes these elements, or describes how they can be achieved, or what research is lacking and therefore warranted?

Limitations – the survey was conducted between 2007 and 2009 – did anything take place during this time that may have influenced later data collection compared with earlier data collection?

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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