Reviewer's report

Title: The caregiving perspective in heart failure: a population based study.

Version: 1 Date: 2 April 2013

Reviewer: Susan J Pressler

Reviewer's report:

General comments: The study deals with a topic of high priority in health care - family caregivers. The study is novel because it uses a population-based approach to examine characteristics of heart failure (HF) caregivers in comparison to caregivers of persons with other conditions.

Specific comments:

Literature review: The literature review addresses the need to study caregivers of HF patients who are near death and compare their needs with needs of caregivers of non-HF patients. Please consider adding one or two more paragraphs about the current state of HF caregiving research given there are many clinical studies of HF caregivers’ needs and add how this study adds to the state of knowledge about HF caregiving.

Methods: Although the Survey has been published, it would be helpful to add more information about the Survey and questionnaires used for readers unfamiliar with the larger Survey. Consider adding a figure of the design.

Design: The study used data from random population-based survey in Australia that is conducted annually. The methodology for the survey is described.

Sample: Description of sampling method is described.

Setting: Descibed.

Measures: More detail is needed about the measures. What were the questions asked or participants? How were they developed? How were unmet needs measured? Have validity and reliability been evaluated? This will assist the reader in reading results.

Statistical analysis: The first sentence states that the data were weighted by age group, sex, geographics, and birth country. Can you explain which data were weighted and give rationale? How did analyses account for unequal group sizes?

In the analysis it says the dependent variable in the regression analyses was cause of death. Can you make sure this matches the purpose stated earlier of examining needs of caregivers?

Results: Results are important in that caregivers provided care for many years and the experience was worse than expected. What is difference between specialist palliative care and palliative care services – could this be added to the measures?

In the statement the “model found 2 significant factors that helped explain the
difference between caregivers for people with HF and caregivers for people with other diagnoses” Was the dependent variable death as noted in the analysis section? Adding a sentence of interpretation here would be useful.

Discussion: On page 6 there is a note that the “questions could not be modified just for questions relating to EOL” – how did this influence results of the study? Please consider expanding the discussion section to add how this study expands on clinical studies of the HF caregiving experience.

Conclusion: While it is true that “The need for assistance with physical care has not been documented using a similar methodology before” there are many studies about HF caregiving and these population-based results provide further support about the complexities of HF caregiving.

Table 2: Why is sample size different than Table 1?

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests