Reviewer’s report

Title: Patient delay in cancer diagnosis: what do we really mean and can we be more specific?

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Reviewer’s report: Patient “delay” is a problematic and pejorative term, and an area of research that is beset with methodological challenges. This paper is an interesting and well-written discussion piece in which the concept of patient delay is critiqued and reconceptualised. The authors present a logical argument which represents a useful contribution to the literature. The evidence sources cited are comprehensive and credible.

The authors argue that analysis of the patient appraisal and help-seeking interval should be symptom-based (e.g. hoarseness versus haemoptysis) rather than disease-based (lung cancer). This makes sense, since different symptoms have different natural histories. However, there is often a lack of clinical consensus regarding what constitutes an appropriate patient interval for individual symptoms or clusters of symptoms, for example in the case of ovarian cancer. The authors don’t appear to acknowledge this issue adequately. In addition, they suggest a few alternative terms, e.g. “prolonged”, “extended” or “timely” “patient interval” or “time to presentation”, but I think it would help the readership if the authors decided on a suitable term.

The latter comments are discretionary revisions which I would encourage the authors to consider, but are not essential.

Level of interest: An article of importance 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.