Reviewer’s report

Title: Reconciling employment with caring for a husband with an advanced illness

Version: 3 Date: 18 August 2009

Reviewer: Emily Cherlin

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Major Compulsory Revisions

The present research addresses an important subject, especially due to the demographic changes that are happening in our society. I do think that the authors could strengthen the background by focusing on the gap in the literature and what the present study will add to that gap. I do not know why the authors indicate in the background that “we need empirical evidence to understand how choices are made and negotiated between carers and patients”. This study is a qualitative study and does not add empirical evidence. The place to indicate the need for empirical evidence would be in the discussion, such as for future research.

Methods

This section of this paper still lacks clarity and it is critical that this section be revised.

1. Paragraph 1: “Data were collected in the context of a study exploring experiences of breathlessness among patients with advanced lung cancer…”
   It needs to be clear who these patients are (i.e., parent, wife, husband)

2. Paragraph 1: “at different stages of their illness, and in different care settings”
   It would be helpful to know what is meant by their illness, such as what stage of the illness; also, please elucidate on the care setting

3. Paragraph 2: “Carers were approached through patients they cared for”
   The authors need to be more specific in describing how the sample was selected. How did the authors get access to the patients? Did the researchers get prior approval to address the patients if that is indeed how the carers were recruited?

4. Paragraph 2: “Demographic data and other information were obtained directly from carers during the interview (See Table 1).”
   Demographic data (Table) should be in the results

5. Paragraph 2: “Patients’ information was retrieved from patients’ records or special databases.”
   Please clarify how the researchers got access to the patients records? Was Internal Review Board approval needed for this? It is important to indicate that.
6. Paragraph 3: “The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured lasted between 40 and 150 minutes”

   It would be helpful to provide a citation after in-depth and semi-structured, as readers not familiar with qualitative research methods may want to know more about what these types of interviews are. Also, the time frame for the length of interviews should be in the results section of the paper.

7. Paragraph 4: The authors explain that a topic guide was used to ensure that all necessary topics were covered. The authors need to be more clear on these topics. Areas such as life situation, attitudes from the social environment, views on services (i.e., what services) and attitudes to the future are all so broad.

8. Paragraph 4: The authors indicated that field notes were kept in situations where it was inappropriate to tape record – what type of situations was it inappropriate to tape record?

9. Paragraph 5: The authors indicate the paper was based on a purposive sample of informal wife-carers, it would help to understand the sampling frame – were they all wives, any daughters or others in the sample? Also, the authors focused on 6 carers for whom employment was an important issue – wasn’t that discovered in the analysis? I think that sentence should be deleted.

10. Paragraph 5: the authors indicated that NVIVO was designed to manage and analyze qualitative data. Software packages such as NVIVO are not designed to analyze data, rather to assist in the analysis process.

11. Paragraph 5: a citation should be inserted after constant comparative method.

12. Paragraph 6: The authors again report that the data were collected in the context of a broader program – this paragraph could be eliminated, as this was described at the beginning of the methods.

Methods – why in-depth interviews and case studies (how many); it would help to understand why both methods were used and also, when the authors indicate that interviews were in-depth and semi-structured; it might make sense to then explain that case studies were also utilized to collect the data. Following that, the authors could describe the data analysis (so just organize the methods by Sampling, data collection, data analysis).

Results

13. In this section, the authors should explain the demographics of the sample.

14. I think the results are interesting, however what I find confusing: the authors focused on 6 carers for whom employment was an issue. It would be helpful if the issues

Minor Essential Revisions

Paper still needs proofing such for minor errors such as use of apostrophe in the Introduction, second paragraph, third sentence from the end of the paragraph.

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

**Quality of written English**: Needs some language corrections before being published

**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