Reviewer's report

Title: QUALZICE: A QUALitative exploration of the experiences of the participants from the ZICE clinical trial (metastatic breast cancer) receiving intravenous or oral bisphosphonates

Version: 1 Date: 13 June 2013

Reviewer: Sarah Denford

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
1. The question is clearly defined, interesting and relevant. It is crucial that we understand participants’ perceptions of trials.
2. Question: as you discussed in the introduction of your paper, qualitative interviews are clearly suitable for the aims of the study.
3. Recruitment: the purposive sample is appropriate to explore a range of views and opinions. However, could you clarify how participants were recruited and by whom. It would also be helpful if you could clarify how you came to the decision to cease data collection (i.e. how did you know that a representative sample had been recruited to each group)?
4. Data collection: it would help the reader if you could provide a bit more detail on the questions that participants were asked. As above, it would be helpful if you could explain your reasons for ceasing data collection. You say interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour – could you provide the mean time? You seem to have a lot of data from relatively short interviews.
5. The paragraph at the top of page 11, in which you explain that the interviewers clearly introduced themselves as researchers, is useful and important.
6. Ethics: ethical approval is clearly stated.

Are the data sound and well controlled?

7. The sample size is large for a qualitative study. IPA recommendations are for a sample of 6-10, and you have 6-10 per group - a total of 42. A sample size of 42 is too large to provide an in depth account of individual experiences, and I think this is reflected in your results. I think the data presented lacks the depth and interpretation necessary for an IPA analysis, and appears to be more of a thematic analysis. However, I think that a thematic analysis is suitable for your research aims.
8. For an IPA study (in which researcher interpretation of data is a key element), I would expect to see greater reflexivity and consideration of the potential biases brought to the analysis by the researchers.
9. It would be useful if you could say a bit more about your attempts to ensure
trustworthiness / reliability of the analysis.

Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

10. The discussions and conclusions are important and reflect the findings reported. However, you cover a lot of issues in the results section, and only some of these issues are discussed. I would also expect to see some consideration of the existing literature, and how your research fits.

11. I think the strengths and limitations of your study could be highlighted. I would expect to see a section in the discussion entitled ‘strengths and limitations.’

Minor compulsory revisions

Is the writing acceptable?

12. Writing style is clear. There is a typo on page 30 in the fifth line of the second paragraph.

**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