Reviewer's report

Title: Validation of a 5-item tool to measure patient assessment of clinician compassion in the emergency department

Version: 1 Date: 07 Sep 2019

Reviewer: Rachel Weiss

Reviewer's report:

Overall, this article sets out to validate a survey for patient assessment of perceived "compassion" of providers in the ED, expanding on prior research involving the survey and proposing a potential tool which I agree will be of significance both to provider evaluation and to further research on the impact of empathy/compassion. I am particularly intrigued by the authors' discussion of the benefits of utilizing empathy for providers, addressing specifically the ED environment (lower rates of PTSD, lower physician burnout in a population of caretakers who are particularly prone to this) - this is a strength of the paper. Also impressive that the study is multicentered, strengthening the generalizability of the data.

General comments:

- Acknowledging this is a validation study of a previously developed survey, I was curious why the authors chose the term "compassion" instead of "empathy." The definition of compassion in the introduction is helpful, and seems to have overlap, however several of the referenced studies specifically use "empathy" instead.

- It would be interesting to delineate some of the characteristics of the physicians being evaluated, if the authors collected this information. For instance level of training (attending/resident), gender, age, etc. There is ample evidence to suggest that patients and their advocates are not often able to identify or differentiate the members of their care team or their roles. It might also be useful to mention when during the ED visit the survey was administered. While the timeliness of administration of the survey theoretically makes attribution of the information more specific to the ED team (eg less interference from presence of admitting team/specialty consultants/other providers), it would strengthen the study to have this information presented. As this is a validation study only, it could be reasonable if this information is not available.
- Was illness severity included as a patient characteristic in this study? It is often assumed a confounder in studies assessing the impact of perceived physician empathy. Or was "reason for visit" an acceptable replacement for this?

- If available, would suggest noting the primary reason 33 participants did not complete the study, although this is a relatively small percentage of the total included subjects.

- The fact that the survey was only available in English - and that LEP patients or patients from different cultures can interpret care behaviors differently or have different expectations of care should be listed as a limitation of the study, as it impacts generalizability and potentially usefulness of the tool in diverse populations.

- On page 8 line 4 the authors mention that the "5-item compassion measure ranged the full scale (5 to 20), and 49% of respondents gave perfect scores (i.e. a score of 20)." There is no mention previously in the methods section indicating how this score was calculated - as it appears, it is up to the reader to assume based on the key for figure 1 and the supplemental figures that the total score for the survey was the additive of the modified Likert scale with numerical value equivalents.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes
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