Reviewer’s report

Title: A qualitative exploration of the use of calendar landmarking instruments in cancer symptom research

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Reviewer: Una Macleod

Reviewer’s report:

This is a very well written paper exploring the use of calendar methods to aid recall of symptoms onset etc in patients with cancer and patients with potential cancer symptoms. It is new, topical, well conducted and relevant so worth publication. There are just a few things the authors should reflect on:

1. Is it reasonable to include cancer patients plus patients with symptoms but who did not go on to have cancer? Does the diagnosis (or not) of cancer influence recall or place greater or lesser emphasis on symptoms? It may be possible to argue either way – but the inclusion of both these groups needs justification.

2. In many ways the finding that calendars were most use for those with shorter times from first symptoms to consultation weakens the potential of the method considerably – but as this is qualitative and therefore not generalizable – some statement needs to be made about that.

3. I do wonder whether in a good qualitative interview about symptom onset and pathway etc these findings would have emerged anyway. For example in clinical practice patients of their own volition will often tell stories relating symptoms to family etc events.

4. The authors also need to consider the strengths and weaknesses of including both a rural Australian population and a mixed east/NE England population.

Minor point – p 4 – the Corner studies were not done in Scotland, were they? Unless there are some missing commas and a reference to Scottish work.

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

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