Reviewer’s report

Title: A cohort study on the evolution of psychosocial problems in older cancer patients: comparison with younger cancer patients and older primary care patients without cancer

Version: Date: 14 November 2014

Reviewer: Satabdi Chatterje

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

The aim of the study is very interesting, and relevant. The authors have done a good job with explaining the study rationale, and the need for this study. The study findings are also interesting. However, my main concern is the fact that the psychosocial variables were treated separately, particularly for YCP and OCP, despite significant overlap among them. It would be more appropriate to conduct MANCOVA since the dependent variables are related. I also have a concern regarding the wide confidence intervals for baseline values, impairment, and lack of information on the distribution of the outcome variables. This could be due to sample size issue (less likely), non-normal distribution of the outcome variables, collinearity or data entry errors or all. Also, the study did not mention the lack of generalizability as a limitation (only a few care settings in 2 European countries), and how future studies can be helpful in addressing the key findings of this study (other than the role of GPs). The importance of social support and behavioral interventions can be strengthened in this regard to improve the status of psychosocial care of these patients.

The other question I had was regarding the use of CCI as a predictor in multivariable analysis. CCI is a well-validated risk adjustor but is more suited for outcomes like mortality. In this case, patients who died at T1 were already excluded. So what was the use of CCI? I would rather suggest the authors use a more relevant risk adjustor depending on their study objective. Also, the authors did not control for baseline hospitalization, no. of GP visits which could be proxy measures for underlying patient severity.

Discretionary Revisions

Suggest avoiding use of first person (I, We) when possible.

Abstract: Too general. Please rewrite with a focus on the main findings.

Methods:

Results: Please mention sample size of patients in each group, and provide numbers (%) and ORs for the findings.

Introduction: Suggest mentioning one or two sentences on cancer before
explaining the psychosocial problems of the disease.

Methods:
Information on apriori sample size for the study was not provided.

Results:
The authors did not report c-statistic of the logistic regression models.
Lines 330-332: "Compared to having no cancer, the OR for surgery in combination with chemotherapy was greater than one, but not significant (OR: 1.73; 95% CI:0.80 - 3.72)"-If the findings are not significant, there is no difference. Suggest rephrase this and other similar sentences, where the authors have said so.

Discussion:
Too lengthy; Please focus on the main findings.

Minor Revisions:
Abstract:
Methods:
Line 56: Delete "at one year of follow-up".
Line 57: Replace comorbidity with "comorbidities".

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.