Author’s response to reviews

Title: A Comparison of Symptoms in Older Hospitalised Cancer and Non-Cancer Patients in Need of Palliative Care: A Secondary Analysis of Two Cross-sectional Studies

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Professor Pasini,

We would like to thank you to have potentially accepted our manuscript “A Comparison of Symptoms in Older Hospitalised Palliative Cancer and Non-Cancer Patients: A Secondary Analysis of Two Cross-sectional Studies.” The answers to the required revisions are provided in attachment and the changes were integrated in the manuscript.

We are pleased to resubmit this revised version to the editorial board of BMC Geriatrics to consider it for publication.

The manuscript contains original and unpublished work. The authors, Aurélie Van Lancker, Ann Van Hecke, Verhaeghe Sofie, Matthias Mattheeuws, Dimitri Beeckman would like to resubmit the manuscript “A Comparison of Symptoms in Older Hospitalised Palliative Cancer and Non-Cancer Patients: A Secondary Analysis of Two Cross-sectional Studies.” exclusively to the BMC Geriatrics. The work has not been published and is not being considered for publication elsewhere.

Looking forward to an answer of the editorial team of the BMC Geriatrics, please accept our best regards.
Yours sincerely,
On behalf of all authors,

Aurélie Van Lancker

Response to the editor and reviewers

1. Please include the full name of all ethics committees (and the institute to which it belongs to) that approved the study and the committee’s reference number if appropriate.

The authors included the full name of all ethics committees that approved the study (page 8). The comments from all the different ethics committees were collected by the leading ethics committee of the University Hospital of Ghent, so only one reference number is provided.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics review committee of the teaching hospital (University Hospital Ghent) and general hospitals (Maria Middelaers Hospital Ghent, General Hospital Sint-Lucas Ghent, Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Lourdes Hospital Waregem, General Hospital Sint-Lucas Bruges, General Hospital Alma Eeklo, Onze Lieve Vrouw Hospital Alost, General Hospital Nikolaas, Sint-Andries Hospital Tielt) (B670201317036 and B670201523233).

2. Currently, the statement in your “consent for publication” section of your declarations is incorrect. Consent for publication refers to consent for the publication of identifying images or other personal or clinical details of participants that compromise anonymity. Seeing as this is not applicable to your manuscript please state “Not Applicable” in this section.

The authors changed the statement in the consent for publication section to ‘not applicable’ (page 15).
3. Please move funding information from your title page to your declarations.

The funding information was moved from the title page to the declarations.

4. Please include a "competing interests" section in your declarations

The authors are unclear about the question of the handling editor. A competing interest section is already present in the declarations. If this section is incorrect, the authors are willing to adapt after further clarification.

5. Please provide figure legends under a separate heading of 'Figure Legends' after the References. If Figure titles/legends are within the main text of the manuscript, please move them. Figure files should contain only the image, as well as any associated keys/annotations. If legends are present within the figure files, please remove them.

The authors added a section of ‘figure legends’ in the manuscript after the references (page 20). The figure title and legends were removed from the figure file.

6. Please remove your cover letter from your supplementary files.

The cover letter has been removed from the supplementary files.

7. We would also like to ask for you to provide more justification for the contributions of AVH, SV, MM and DB as currently they do not automatically qualify for authorship. Contribution to data collection or supervision alone, does not usually justify authorship.

An 'author' is generally considered to be someone who has made substantive intellectual contributions to a published study.

According to the ICMJE guidelines, to qualify as an author one should have:
a) made substantial contributions to conception and design, or acquisition of data, or analysis and interpretation of data; AND

b) been involved in drafting the manuscript or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND

c) given final approval of the version to be published. Each author should have participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content; AND

d) agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved. Anyone listed as an author must be included in this section. If you choose to change your author list you will need to fill out a change in authorship form and send it by email to the Editorial office to be approved by the Editor. The form can be found here: https://www.biomedcentral.com/getpublished/editorial-policies#authorship. Anyone who contributed towards the article who does not meet the criteria for authorship can be acknowledged in the ‘Acknowledgements’ section.

The authors made all substantial contribution to the manuscript:

Aurélie Van Lancker: conception and design of the study, acquisition of the data, analysis and interpretation of the data, drafting of the manuscript, and approving the final version.

Ann Van Hecke: conception and design of the study, interpretation of the data, critically revising the manuscript, and approving the final version.

Sofie Verhaeghe: conception and design of the study, interpretation of the data, critically revising the manuscript, and approving the final version.

Matthias Mattheeuws: conception and design of the study, acquisition of the data, analysis and interpretation of the data, critically revising the manuscript, and approving the final version.

Dimitri Beeckman: conception and design of the study, interpretation of the data, critically revising the manuscript, and approving the final version.
8. At this stage, please upload your manuscript as a single, final, clean version that does not contain any tracked changes, comments, highlights, strikethroughs or text in different colours. All relevant tables/figures/additional files should also be clean versions. Figures (and additional files) should remain uploaded as separate files.

The authors removed all track changes, comments, highlights, strikethroughs and text in different colours from the manuscript.

9. I clearly understand very well that the authors did not consider it as feasible to adjust the research question that had already been set prior to having conducted the study. However, I think that the overall message of the paper is much more balanced now, and it definitely corresponds much better with the data reported in the Table / Figure. In my view, the phrase on p. 13, ll. 30 - 38 would be worth remaining in the paper (the authors deleted it in the revised manuscript) - I found this a valuable conclusion in the original manuscript (particularly the indication for healthcare professionals and for education); I think that against the background of the overall much more balanced message of the paper, this passage is rather informative for clinical practice and education. However, I will of course leave it up to the authors' decision whether to keep this paragraph in their paper or not.

The authors wish to thank the reviewer for this understanding. They reintroduced the previously removed paragraph as suggested by the reviewer.

10. As to my last comment concerning the writing style, I am afraid that I may have expressed myself not very well - my apologies for that. Of course, I did not consider the message of the respective paragraph redundant, but rather the way of phrasing it since the sentences sounded a little bit repetitious. (Alternative suggestion: "Both patient groups might benefit from a referral to palliative support teams. These are specialised in managing complex symptoms, and the literature indicates that an early referral to a palliative support team increases patients' quality of life.)

The authors changed the sentences in the discussion section as suggested by the reviewer.
11. There are just a very few typos in the new passages added by the authors, e.g. on p. 5 l. 11 ('This might strongly suggest' instead of 'suggests'); p. 5, l. 13 (I think it is 'needs-based' instead of 'need-based'); p. 9, l. 1 (...had to be identical TO allow to patients...).

The authors wish to thank the reviewer for these comments. They changed the typos in the manuscript.