Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 06 Nov 2017

Reviewer: Klaus Hager

Reviewer's report:

The paper deals with a new aspect of elderly, palliative non-cancer patients compared to elderly palliative cancer patients. One limitation is that the data stem from two different studies and were analysed retrospectively. There may be differences in the two groups. This is discussed under "Strengths and limitations". Both studies were done by at least some of the authors. The authors show convincingly that efforts were made to minimize a selection bias. The results, especially the high number of symptoms as well as the high frequency and intensity in non-cancer patients are important. Therefore, the paper should be published.

The following short list of questions and misspellings should be addressed by the authors.

Questions and misspellings:

1. Who classified the patients as "palliative", "terminal" or nothing of the two possibilities? Was it the panel of experts (n=7).

2. One researcher (AVL) collected data from the cancer patients, whereas the other researcher (MM) collected data from the non-cancer patients. Even considering the fact that one researcher educated the other one about collecting the data, there may be a bias. This might be mentioned in the chapter about limitations.

3. Table 1 footnote: The authors write that a fTRST score of 0 and 1 is considered to be normal, a score >2 indicates a geriatric risk profile. What about a score of 2?

4. Page 6, line 2: Palliative patients not patientrs.

5. Page 7, line 2: comparison

6. Page 7, line 16: The fTRST is a screening tool which includes five items scored as present or absent.
7. Page 18: Figure 1. Frequency and intensity of symptoms in older palliative cancer and non-cancer patients

8. Page 18 and header of figure 1: In the header of the tables the words are written with capital letters but not with figure 1 on page 18 and in the header of the figure itself

9. Table 3: Pain (psychological) (space is missing)

10. Figure 1: Airway mucus ("r" is missing)

11. Figure 1: Fatigue (psychosocial) (space is missing)

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

Yes

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

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

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