Reviewer’s report

Title: Early and late signs that precede dying among older persons in nursing homes: The multidisciplinary team's perspective

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Reviewer: Nancy A. Hodgson

Reviewer's report:

The authors present findings from a small qualitative study of focus groups in four nursing homes to describe nursing home staff’s perceptions of early and late stages of dying. The topic is important given the poor end of life care offered to many nursing home residents. The authors should be commended for tackling this complex topic. Nonetheless several significant weaknesses exist that limit this reviewer's enthusiasm.

First, the authors equate "palliative care" with "end of life". For example, focus group questions ask "What are early/late signs …in older person that has a palliative care need?" rather than "What are early/late symptoms of end of life?"

Background section is clouded by redundancy and it is not clear how poor end of life care is defined. It is missing a discussion on what is known about signs and symptoms of impending death in nursing home residents. Also missing is how nursing home staff are typically prepared (educated and trained) for end of life care. This would also be important to describe specifically in this sample in Table 1 (specific years of training in palliative care, hospice care experience?)

Setting section should describe the nursing homes in detail (currently listed in the Sampling section. There is some inconsistency in that the authors report that the 4 unit managers agree to participate but only 2 are listed in Table 1.

Reference #3 is cited often for broad generalizations (such as "rare use of palliative care in nursing homes" and "nursing homes as most common site of death"), when other more generalizable references are available.

There is no attention to reporting important attention to methodological rigor. This would include steps such as credibility via member checking, confirmability via audit trails and regular meetings with the team; reliability of coding by using a second person to code a subset interviews (and % agreement achieved), peer debriefing and/or triangulation during the data integration phase to increase the credibility and dependability of the findings.

Moreover it is concerning that under theme of "Low Mood", the assistant moderator seems to direct the conversation towards the theme E.g., "A bit subdued", leading to concerns of investigator bias.
Finally, and most importantly it is unclear how the findings add to what is already known about this topic.

**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.

No

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

No

**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.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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