Author’s response to reviews

Title: Non-Spouse Companions Accompanying Older Adults to Medical Visits: A Qualitative Analysis

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Author’s response to reviews:

We would like to thank Dr. Bartlam and the reviewers for taking the time to review our revised manuscript. We appreciate the opportunity to address the latest round of comments below.

Thank you for attending to previous comments. Unfortunately, there are a large number of substantive comments from reviewer 2 that you have not sufficiently addressed:

We are happy to provide further clarification and detail. We do note that reviewer 1 was satisfied with our previous responses, but do appreciate an opportunity to be more even clear on how we proceeded. We hope that our responses now address the comments sufficiently.

Comment 4: you have provided more detail in the text response, but not within the manuscript itself. You say you have "added further details" but these amount to 2 brief sentences only. The
details on the collaboration with the Director of THREAD would add important detail, as would paying attention to the advice in the comment.

Response: We welcome the opportunity to provide further detail in the manuscript and have added the information provided in the response to reviewer two into the manuscript (first paragraph of the methods section lines 114-120).

Comments 5 and 6: you provide clarity in your textual response but this clarity remains absent within the analysis section of the manuscript, e.g. saying "followed by a group meeting of team members" says nothing about the analysis process itself.

Response: On reviewing our responses we agree that our coding process required further explanation in the manuscript. As well as adding some of the information provided in the textual response to the manuscript we have added additional detail about the process to the methods section on Qualitative Data Analysis lines 155-169.

Comment 7: This remains unclear within the manuscript, including the order in which the analysis stages you do outline took place which is confused. Were unique identifiers and the relationship of the MVC’s to the patients only established at the end of the analysis? If so what was the rationale for this? When and how did the coding team reach consensus on codes and themes? How was reliability checked across the coding pairs? When you met as a group in the early stage of analysis, the issue of how themes emerged still remains unclear - please clarify how team members other than AGP familiarised themselves with the data in order to agree the themes - at the moment it reads as though they relied on the interpretation by AGP - it is not sufficient to say 'reviewed the transcripts during the day'. Did they do this through detailed reading, independent coding (which sort/level) etc... It still remains unclear whether the 4 coders are the entire team, and if not what the role of other team members was in the process (if any).

Response: We are happy to provide additional detail which we have added to the methods section on Qualitative Data Analysis. Specific answers to your questions can be found below.

A. Were unique identifiers and the relationship of the MVC’s to the patients only established at the end of the analysis? If so what was the rationale for this?

The assignment of identifiers occurred after the consent process but prior to the commencement of the focus group. We have moved the line describing this from the paragraph on qualitative data analysis to the paragraph above on focus groups to make the timeline clearer. Lines 147-149 now read “The relationship of the companion to the person they accompanied was noted and a
A unique identifier was assigned to each participant prior to the commencement of the focus group.

Identifiers were known when the data was being analyzed as indicated in lines 176 of the paragraph on qualitative data analysis “The identifiers allowed us to consider cultural sensitivities within the data when we conducted the analyses.”

B. When and how did the coding team reach consensus on codes and themes?

In conducting our analyses we were guided by the principle that multiple minds bring multiple ways of interpreting data. A preliminary set of codes was suggested by the lead coder and then during the day long codebook preparation day additional codes were proposed by all four members of the coding team. The coding team discussed interpretation asking questions about circumstances in which the code should and should not be used. Through this discussion consensus was reached on codes. Additional detail has been added to the methods section to explain our process in lines 155-180.

C. How was reliability checked across the coding pairs?

We used the formula described by Miles and Huberman (Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook (Second Edi). Sage Publications) to establish inter-rater reliability where reliability is equal to the number of agreements divided by the sum of the number of agreements and disagreements. Counts were performed of the total codes by each coder and the number of agreements between the two coders that coded each transcript. We have added a reference to the Miles and Huberman publication to the Qualitative Data Analysis section of the methods, line 179.

D. When you met as a group in the early stage of analysis, the issue of how themes emerged still remains unclear - please clarify how team members other than AGP familiarised themselves with the data in order to agree the themes - at the moment it reads as though they relied on the interpretation by AGP - it is not sufficient to say 'reviewed the transcripts during the day'. Did they do this through detailed reading, independent coding (which sort/level) etc... It still remains unclear whether the 4 coders are the entire team, and if not what the role of other team members was in the process (if any).

Thank you for your questions. AGP circulated the transcripts and preliminary list of codes to the other three coders prior to the in person meeting of the coding team and requested that all coders read them prior to attending the meeting. During the day long coding meeting there were periods
of discussion and transcript review for codes both alone and in groups. There were 4 members of the coding team and these four were the only members of the team involved in analysis of transcripts. The other team members were involved in developing the concept and development and critical revision of the manuscript.

To address these questions please find additional detail in the methods paragraph on qualitative data analysis lines 157-160 as follows:

“All team members involved in coding were sent the transcripts and a list of the initial themes identified by the lead coder for review prior to meeting. The four coders then met over the course of a day reviewing transcripts both alone and then in groups to build upon the list of themes”.

Comment 8: It is not sufficient to acknowledge that the term 'validity' was inappropriate and remove it - the concept of reliability/trustworthiness and the steps taken to support this need to be documented, particularly in terms of implications for data saturation. See for example Saunders, B et al, 2018: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8.

Response: The reason we removed the term validity is that on further reflection on its many uses and meanings in qualitative data research we did not want to cause readers to misinterpret our use of the word. In the article you shared that does an excellent job of outlining the issue of saturation in qualitative data analysis they refer to the work of Francis et al where saturation is linked with the notion of content validity similar to the work of Wainer and Braun. Joppe refers to validity differently, as “whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure”. Reliability can also be subject to misinterpretation in qualitative research. Stenbacka argues that issues of reliability pertain to measurements and therefore have no place in qualitative research. Seale and others compare reliability to the establishment of trustworthiness. The issue of reliability and validity in qualitative research is nicely summarized by Golafshani.

We completely agree with the need to establish both the reliability and validity (the trustworthiness, and rigor) of our work. We hope that by further clarifying and detailing our methodology we have provided you with reassurance of both.


Comment 9: you have missed the point of this comment which asked that you indicate how race and culture were accounted for much earlier in the research process (if they were).

Response: We appreciate the opportunity to address this point and we apologize for our misinterpretation of the comment. We would be happy to indicate how race and culture were accounted for. Our recruitment strategy was designed to capture the perspectives of medical visit companions of different racial groups. Baptist churches in Baltimore have congregations predominantly made up of either Caucasians or African Americans allowing us the opportunity to look for differences in experiences. When conducting our analysis two coders coded each transcript, one coder was Caucasian and one was African American. This allowed coders the opportunity to bring their own cultural perspectives to the analysis, to propose codes that perhaps would not have been identified by a coder of a different racial group to the focus group participants and improved our ability to interpret nuances of language, phraseology and spirituality.

We have added further detail to the manuscript to outline these points in more detail (lines 124-126 and lines 173-177).

Comment 10: You have not sufficiently addressed the issue of data saturation. For example, there is no indication of whether or not on-going analysis and emerging findings dictated the number of focus groups, or what the relationship was between analysis and data collection - see Saunders paper above.

Response: The Saunders paper very clearly outlines different models of saturation in qualitative data analysis. We employed inductive thematic saturation in our analysis and when we refer to thematic saturation in line 181 our use of the word saturation refers to the emergence of new codes or themes and not a decision to stop conducting further focus groups. We felt that saturation was achieved when mounting instances of the same codes were found but no new codes emerged.
The number of focus groups we held was guided by “saturation” of themes but at a more general level than the saturation of codes described above. After each focus group the moderators discussed if they heard new themes in the discussion. Little new data was felt to be emerging in groups five and six. A seventh site had agreed to participate but scheduling difficulties had arisen and guided by the moderators we chose to stop pursuing this site and move to the analysis phase after six focus groups. The option was there to proceed with further focus groups at a later stage but after conducting the analysis we did not feel that this was necessary. To clarify this the following line has been added to the manuscript “When moderators felt that no further themes were emerging during the focus groups data collection ended” (line 145-146).

Comment 17: There is no indication in the manuscript of how you have incorporated the systematic reporting guidelines suggested.

Response: We appreciate the opportunity to clearly outline our compliance with the reporting guidelines and have completed and uploaded the checklist detailed in Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): a 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. International journal for quality in health care, 19(6), 349-357. We have also added additional detail to the manuscript where needed to address items in the checklist e.g. dates of focus groups, field note taking, sharing of transcripts with focus group participants etc. and if the editor agrees would suggest publishing the checklist as a supplemental table.

Unfortunately, the account of the analysis as a whole remains lacking in detail, as does the process of data collection (see reviewer 2 comments in detail and also my further responses above), and in particular how these inter-related, and the implications for data saturation and consequently the reliability/trustworthiness of your findings.

We truly appreciate the opportunity to improve our manuscript and to further clarify and document the details of our work. We hope that these latest revisions are satisfactory and improve the quality of the manuscript. Thank you for your time and consideration.