Author's response to reviews

Title: Current advance care planning practice in the Australian community: a survey of Home Care Package case managers and service managers

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Ms Catia Cornacchia

Executive Editor

BMC Palliative Care

Re: Current advance care planning practice in the Australian community: a survey of Home Care Package case managers and service managers.

Dear Ms Cornacchia,

We would like to re-submit the above article for consideration for publication in BMC Palliative Care on behalf of all of the authors.

Please note the following changes have been made to the manuscript with consideration to comments received on the 23rd of September 2014:

On behalf of the authorship team, I address the comments as follows.

1. Background: Please provide a brief explanation to orient the reader to what is meant by a ¿care package¿ ¿ the meaning of this term will not be obvious to an international readership. Please also explain the roles/functions of `case managers¿ and `service managers¿ in relation to the organization of community care in Australia.

We have revised the introduction of the manuscript to orient the reader to what is meant by Home Care Packages in the context of the Australian healthcare system. We have also provided an explanation about the roles/functions of case managers and service managers in the second paragraph of the introduction:

“HCP services are funded by the Australian Government to facilitate the provision of personal support and clinical care services to elderly clients (aged >65 years), so that they can remain at home for as long as possible. HCP service providers tender to government for the right to provide HCPs. The role of the service manager is to ensure that HCPs are delivered to clients in accordance with government guidelines. HCP clients are assigned a case manager who, in collaboration with the client and family, coordinates and reviews the care services that clients receive under the funding allocated to the HCP.[10]”
2. Discussion: Given that you identify this research as a \textit{preliminary study}, please provide a paragraph or two outlining your vision for future research that should be conducted in light of what you have discovered in this study.

We agree. Thank you for the suggestion. We have included a more robust discussion about our vision for future research in this area at the end of the discussion:

"Given that the prevalence of care services for the elderly generally[29] and for HCP services specifically[10] is expected to increase, the next step for research in this area is, firstly, to identify different possible models for delivering effective ACP to recipients of HCP services and then to test them in a controlled way. Such ACP models should aim to overcome barriers and facilitate ACP at the case manager, client and caregiver and system levels. In accordance with the facilitators and barriers identified in this study we propose that the ‘referral only’ model and ‘case manager facilitator’ model should be further developed and tested in a Randomised Controlled Trial. For example, this study identifies that case managers believe they have a role in ACP and that it is worthwhile for their clients; however, they do not currently have the systems and support at the organisational level to facilitate ACP discussions. It is currently unclear which model would improve the uptake of ACP among HCP clients.

Furthermore, to best evaluate future ACP interventions we recommend studies measure outcomes that relate to the known benefits of ACP generally and also the foreseeable benefits of ACP for HCP clients specifically. Such outcome measures should include: the likelihood that doctors and family members know and comply with the patients’ wishes [3-6] and patient and family satisfaction with care, as well as reduced stress, anxiety and depression in surviving relatives. [4-6, 9] Therefore, we will not only be able determine whether the proposed model increases the uptake of ACP among HCP clients, but also whether it improves end-of-life outcomes for HCP clients, including whether their wishes are known and respected by the family and doctors."

Yours Sincerely,

Assoc. Prof. W. Silvester