Reviewer’s report

Title: Case management in primary palliative care is associated more strongly with organisational than with patient characteristics. Results from a cross-sectional prospective study

Version: 2 Date: 24 March 2015

Reviewer: Thomas M Carroll

Reviewer’s report:

Discretionary Revisions (recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

Lines 117-118: Are there data on how many (what percentage of) GPs and home care nurses take part in these short courses? If so, this would provide additional context for this study.

Lines 118-122: Are there data regarding what percentage of the country (whether population or geography based) is covered by these two types of specialist palliative care support? If so, this would be helpful for context.

Lines 110-111: Include number of patients enrolled in this study.

Line 124: Are these initiatives specifically focused on palliative care interventions, or do they have other/additional focuses? Similar to other comments re: needing better definition of what these initiatives are (might not be necessary here if they are better defined above).

Lines 124-125: Was reference 3 a survey or study? I would refer to it as one or the other.

Line 141: By “duration of the contact” do you mean that specific, first, interaction only or a series of interactions?

Lines 149-160: Would reorder this part of the paragraph to be chronological. Data collection period # consent obtained by case managers # registration and questionnaire completed # case managers anonymized the data # etc. Remove “The authors/researchers did not interact with the patients”. Remove Lines 159-160 and replace with (something like) “Case managers generally enrolled consecutive patients, although in some cases enrolled every second patient due to logistical limitations.”

Line 224: Change “…start early in the disease…” to “…first contact early relative to disease trajectory…”

Lines 337-340: I would reword this sentence to something like, “Despite the generally agreed upon goal of palliative care providing patient centered care, our data suggest that organization characteristics are more important…”
Lines 340-341: I would remove the last sentence. If you want to keep it, then I would recommend changing it to something like, "It is notable that organizational..."

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Entire manuscript: Change all occurrences of “less contacts” to “fewer contacts”

Table 1 caption: Change, “(for this paper...patients).” to something like, “(only initiatives involving cancer patients were included in this study).”

Paragraph starting on line 72. This paragraph begins with discussion of care managers’ roles and then uses the term “case management initiatives” without apparent transition or definition (line 82). Please define what an initiative is (research, etc.) and how these relate to case managers’ responsibilities. Perhaps this should be dealt with in a separate paragraph, or incorporated into the preceding paragraph (lines 65-70).

Line 149: Please change to “Data were”

Line 227: Change “at patients” to “to patients”

Line 288: Change "articulate" to something like "striking"

Table 5: Are the confidence intervals “95% CIs”? I assume they are, but don’t see that defined.

Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Lines 163-185 – I do not understand the methods used, and so cannot comment on them. These may be very standard and well accepted procedures, but logtransforming (and transforming them back) due to skewed data and adding “1” to reduce the number of missing observations could come across as being of questionable reliability if not better explained. Unfortunately, since I truly don’t understand the math, I cannot comment on how to make this more readable.

There should be a standard “Table 1” that lists patient characteristics. These are listed in the results, but I would like to see them in a table.

Table 1: “Number of patients enrolled in the study”. Related to the above comment, should “study” be changed to “initiative”? It is not clear to me exactly what an “initiative” is. My impression is that an initiative is an organization whose purpose is to provide case management, but perhaps they are also undertaken as part of a research study? This should be more clear.

Table 4: How were B values chosen for inclusion in the table? It appears that B values were mostly included in the table if the CI is considered significant. However, there are a number of B values with CIs that include 1.00 (and some that cross 1.00). If we are supposed to interpret these as if they are odds ratios
(as directed in line 170), then I would consider any CI that included 1.00 as nonsignificant.

Table 5. The definitions of Blocks 1, 2, and 3 are not clear. I do not see explanation of these blocks in the Methods.

Paragraph starting on line 85. The statement is made, “…support from the case manager is tailored…” Isn’t one of the goals of this study to determine to what extent this is true? If the statement is accurate, then this would imply that this study was not necessary. Similar issue with the wording of lines 96-99. Perhaps simply replace “is” with “aim to be” or “purport to be” might be enough?

Lines 221-232: “B” is not defined (in the text or in Table 4 caption) that I can see. It appears to represent the “logtransformed” odds ratio-like number that was calculated (I’m inferring this from lines 170-171), but it is not clear to me why this letter is used, or why a letter is needed at all (perhaps it is standard, but unclear). Also, in the table itself it seems unnecessary to have an entire row with “B (CI)” in each column. This could be included in the title of the table.

Lines 236-243, Table 3 and Table 5. I do not understand how the R2 values were calculated for Table 5, nor what they mean. It would be especially helpful to know if there is a range of values considered significant, or if we should be comparing the value in one column/block to the next. I do not see mention of R2 in the Methods, nor do I see an obvious connection between Tables 3 and 5, as suggested by the caption of Table 5.

Lines 336-341: I don’t understand how case managers provided “support in a flexible manner” and “organizational characteristics are more important in prediction of what topics are discussed…” How can both of these things be true?

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests