Reviewer's report

Title: What are families most grateful for after receiving palliative care? Content analysis of written documents received: a chance to improve the quality of care.

Version: 0 Date: 03 Sep 2016

Reviewer: Shelley Peacock

Reviewer's report:
Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. Understanding the perspective of bereaved family members is key to improving palliative home care. Using spontaneous, unsolicited writing, be it cards, letters or newspaper announcements, is a novel way to glean part of this understanding.

It appears that many of the authors participated in writing sections of the manuscript (perhaps the red ink further hints at this) and as such the manuscript does not have a consistent style in presentation. Overall, the manuscript would benefit from editorial feedback to address the awkward sentences, parts that lack flow, and the areas of repetition. As well, consistent use of terms (e.g., families or relatives) and abbreviations (palliative care and PC) would also be of benefit to the entire manuscript. The following is a discussion of the salient areas that need to be addressed in the manuscript.

BACKGROUND: the background has some repetitive writing in the first paragraph and jumps from palliative care to survey's on satisfaction to quality of life, all on the first page. Further, the background would benefit from a definition of family and palliative home care to inform the reader of what the authors' values and beliefs are within the study.

METHODS: Initially a scholarly resource is necessary to support the method undertaken - documentary analysis is not a methodology. This section could be strengthened beyond "a qualitative study". The study context would benefit from a richer description of the specific palliative home care team that the study is based on, what services and support do they offer in the community? The
population and sample has awkward wording as far as the persons who used the service. It seems only patients are described, yet some description of the families/relatives would also be beneficial (particularly as their words are the data). The inclusion and exclusion criteria must be more explicit. Why (if there were possibly any) negative letters excluded? Would such writing offer a worthy perspective, perhaps in contrast to the vast majority that are of positive content? How was the approach carried out "without imposing pre-existing expectations"? Especially in light of other research completed by the team? The methods section would also benefit from a separate section on rigour rather than have it woven within the data collection and analysis. Referencing Miles and Huberman [32] once at the end of the paragraph at the top of p. 7 is not properly citing that source. Concerning ethics, I am curious why the management team would be the only approval sought; why was the Research Ethics Board of the University of Navarra not approached to provide ethical approval? (e.g., perhaps a letter of exemption is warranted). Even if the relatives’ writing was de-identified, would people who offered cards feel comfortable having their words scrutinized as part of a research study?

RESULTS: I believe the results section could have more focus. In fact, quotes and sections of writing are repeated (e.g., p. 8 content is repeated on p. 10, in what is perhaps a different sub-category). The headings of the categories do not require seriation (e.g., "a), b)" etc.). Apart from table 1, it is difficult to discern what the subcategories are, particularly as in the narrative there are many quotes that indicate similar sentiments yet are found across several sub-categories (e.g., end of suffering or quality of life). On p. 10 "evaluation of the outcomes" (actually the way this category is titled leaves one to wonder what outcomes the authors mean) is written using bullet points, yet the other categories are not. I am not convinced that the subcategories are supported by the quotes provided, as an example how is spiritual suffering reflected in comments from PCS27, PL51, or PL33? Or with "messages of support" how does PL69's comments ("…until the end") indicate/support? Until the end of what exactly? This is not clear. "Descriptions of positive life experiences" seems misnamed - how can describing "the difficulty of the experience" be considered positive? At times the results seem choppy and would benefit from writing that ties the findings together and offers further interpretation to the data. The discussion
(also noted in the abstract) is focused on relational aspects, yet this is not drawn out in the results - this is important to explore if that is the 'concept' that brings the data together.

DISCUSSION: The first paragraph (p. 13) is repeated on p. 15. The notion of relational aspects dominates the discussion rather than having the discussion follow the results (e.g., by category). At times the discussion seems more like a review of the literature rather than a discussion of literature that supports or challenges the present study's results; as an example, on p. 15 the authors state that relatives felt included in care - this is not apparent in the results, but is covered in the discussion. Perhaps the discussion would benefit from sections that refer to implications for practice and research, as well as a more detailed discussion of the limitations. At present the authors consider there is a single limitation, and end the paragraph on p. 13 with the statement that only satisfied relatives perceptions are included - this is because this was an inclusion criteria. Certainly families/relatives with negative experiences have something to lend to our understanding of palliative home care.

While the implications of the study are important, respectfully I do not believe at present the manuscript is ready for publication (considering the issues/concerns raised above). The manuscript requires better flow (including reduction in repetition), added discussion of the method and PC team, further interpretation of the results (especially fleshing out the notion of relational aspects), and a more focused discussion section that relates better to the results of the study rather than a review of the literature.

**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.

Unable to assess

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No
Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?

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Not relevant to this manuscript

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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