Reviewer's report

Title: Palliative care specialists' perceptions concerning referral of haematology patients to their services: findings from a qualitative study

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Reviewer: Pedro Emilio Perez Cruz

Reviewer's report:

Dear Authors,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to reviewing this interesting manuscript. Briefly, the manuscript aimed to capture Specialist Palliative Care (SPC) clinicians' perspectives regarding haematology patient referrals to PC services and the factors influencing this using qualitative methods. Twenty in depth, semi-structured interviews were performed to SPC practitioners and then analyzed. Ten themes or topics that were extensively described in the findings section, including "quotes" as examples of the findings. The main conclusion was that collaboration between haematology and PC specialists was considered beneficial and desirable. Although the topic is of interest and the authors made an extensive analysis of the interviews, there are some concerns regarding the relevance of the manuscript, the way the results were presented and the conclusions drawn from the analysis. Due to all these reasons I believe this manuscript needs to be revised before being accepted for publication.

Some specific comments:

Introduction: Overall, is well written and structured. However, the relevance of the study is not clearly addressed. Although there is no information regarding SPC practitioners' perspective of haematology referrals in the literature, why is it relevant to capture SPC practitioners' perspectives regarding this issue? How this information can be useful? How this information could impact of SPC practitioners behaviors specifically regarding haematology referrals? Characterizing better the aim could be helpful to analyze the interviews in a more structured
way. Also, the way the current aim is stated is too general, which makes the analysis of the obtained data challenging (see below).

Methods: The methods used follow a standard qualitative methods strategy. It is important to note that the selection methods of the interviewees was non-probabilistic, which has implications in the generalizability of the data. In fact, the results from qualitative studies attempt to characterize better a phenomenon, rather than to extrapolate the findings to the general population. Therefore, the discussion should be written considering the limitations of the methods used.

It would be also useful to clarify why the experienced qualitative researcher checked the coding of only two interviews and not all of them.

Findings: The authors identified ten themes or topics from the interviews and each of them was extensively described, including several quotes for each of them. From my perspective, the themes are difficult to categorize or to group, making the manuscript challenging to understand/follow from a readers perspective. Perhaps, it would have been useful to have at least a paragraph at the beginning of the "findings" section explaining the way the themes were structured/grouped to facilitate the reading of the manuscript (were the themes selected as barriers and facilitators?) Also, it seems to me that some topics overlap (e.g. topic 5 organization of pc services in the hospital setting and topic 8 understanding of roles and services, in particular the co-working aspect, and the process of relationship building between disciplines).

Discussion: The main question I have is what does this article adds to exiting literature. The main conclusion of the article is that collaboration between disciplines was perceived as beneficial and desirable, though was said to occur less frequently than for patients with other cancers, which is already known. Many of the findings that the authors highlight in the discussion are already described by haematologists. I would suggest to clarify first in the introduction why SPC perspectives is important and then re-write the discussion focusing in what are the new aspects that this perspective add to existing literature.
Thank you again for the opportunity to reviewing this interesting manuscript.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.
Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.
Unable to assess

**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.
I am able to assess the statistics

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:
Acceptable

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