Reviewer’s report

Title: "Just too busy living in the moment and surviving": Barriers to accessing health care for structurally vulnerable populations at end-of-life

Version: 0 Date: 01 Jun 2018

Reviewer: Virginia LeBaron

Reviewer's report:

This is a well-written paper about a very important topic; a pleasure to review.

Some comments and suggestions for revisions:

1. 1. It seems the primary aspect of structural vulnerability involved homelessness/unstable housing. Perhaps title should better reflect this focus. I was also unclear how other aspects of structural vulnerability were identified. Did patients/participants identify themselves as 'vulnerable', or was this solely the perspective of the research team? Eg., what genders and diseases were considered vulnerable and why? Did participants state they were victims of gender discrimination, racism, etc? If so, how was this information captured? This distinction seems important, as patient perspective could be different than the researcher in terms of whether or not they view themselves as 'vulnerable.'

2. The methods section described suggest a rigorous approach of 2.5 years of fieldwork. However, I found myself wanting more detail about how data were collected and analyzed. I suggest shortening the background/introduction and adding more detail about: semi-structured interviews? What was the goal of observations? Not clear how hanging out in someone's home allows one to observe 'accessing health care' - need better description about intent/goal of observations; citations justifying data analysis? - how were observational data combined/integrated with interview data. Need more discussion of how fieldnotes were recorded and what they captured. What about artifacts? How did you gain entree in to the field? How were observational sites selected and key informants identified? Over the 2.5 years, how did various team members integrate their findings?

3. For background and significance: seems unusual to discuss method of ethnography without a discussion of culture. The phrase "It is estimated that only 14% of those in need receive palliative care [1]" - is this a global context, or Canada? Clarify how structural vulnerability is different (or not) from 'vulnerable populations.'
4. A table of exemplar quotes from interviews or key excerpts from fieldnotes would help orient reader and highlight key findings.

5. p15 line 33 - 'participants were very ill and suffering but not on a palliative trajectory' ?? Unclear to me. Clarify what is meant by a 'palliative trajectory' and how this was determined.

6. p14 lines 48-56 - seems to belong in discussion

7. For a non-Canadian reader it would be helpful to provide some brief context for palliative care delivery and housing support in Canada. What is a 'supported housing building'?? How does the Canadian single payer system influence the proposed recommendations? Community based providers do not provide service in homes where people smoke cigarettes??

8. Issues identified related to siloed/fractured care, problems identifying those who need palliative care - these seem like issues faced by all patients with serious illness - how are these concerns uniquely different for 'structurally vulnerable' patients? Would strengthen article to make this point more clearly. Is it possible that by the very nature of being seriously ill/dying in a complex medical system all patients are to some extent 'structurally vulnerable'? How does access to pain management change for patients - a critical element of quality palliative care - who are structurally vulnerable?

9. Discussion at times felt disjointed and key messages hard to find. Consider a table which highlights key clinical, policy and research recommendations.

**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.

Yes
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.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:
Acceptable

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