Reviewer's report

Title: Healthcare professionals’ views of palliative care for American war veterans with nonmalignant respiratory disease living in a rural area: a qualitative study

Version: 0 Date: 03 May 2018

Reviewer: A Catherine Simpson

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The topic is important from the perspective of the global need for improved PC services for those living with advanced and/or life-threatening chronic disease (other than cancer) of which NMRD is but one example. Authors need to give more context to explain why they chose to focus the study on American veterans, i.e., beyond just the cited statistic of COPD being 3x more common in the veteran population. The study "Aim" statement is too broad and non-specific. The focus group question guide includes 2 aim statements, but the second one concerning HCP communication is not clearly connected to what is reported in the manuscript.

No mention of Veterans Administration (VA) as the overseer and purveyor of healthcare services for veterans in the US - this is an important contextual factor for what is available and accessible to veterans from a healthcare perspective.

Insufficient description provided in the methodology section - what is meant by a "broad interpretivist approach" & "thick description"? What was the rural area (state, population, other HC services available, what services are provided and covered in this VA hospital and what does that mean in terms of cost to the patient, provision of services, i.e., what is missing and for what percentage of veterans in the hospital's catchment area)? Why was only one site used (financial reasons, travel implications, etc) and why this one vs one in another state? How were focus groups made up, i.e. on what basis were participants assigned to particular focus groups, or where they?

"Informed consent was also ongoing throughout the focus groups" - what does this mean?

Results and discussion section - Report would be strengthened by adding to the number of illustrative quotations provided as evidence for the interpretation made or conclusions drawn. Some quotations do not seem to connect with interpretations made by the authors. The quotation referring to telemedicine does not even mention palliative care despite the authors using it as evidence to support the use of telemedicine as a new model of PC delivery. Discussion of veterans' coverage via VA belongs in the introduction/background section - it provides some of the necessary context as already mentioned.
I agree with the "limitations" section - it would have strengthened the study to have included focus groups with patients and their caregivers - only getting HCPs' view of what patients and their caregivers think/feel gives a very narrow perspective. Also having more than one site and more than one state (each state has its own culture and context) would have strengthened the study.

Conclusions - NMRD is not "commonly experienced" by veterans, but is more common in this population than the general public. The study has not "demonstrated" anything per se—it has suggested possible perspectives on the issue. In the authors' conclusion related to telemedicine as an option for the delivery of PC in this population, they do not say how this medium might address the barriers identified in the study, i.e., association of PC with dying, and association of PC with "surrendering". Perhaps the most valuable insight arising from the study is this idea that veterans' may view PC somewhat differently then the general public, yet the authors have not offered suggestions for future research or follow-up. I found it difficult to accept the interpretive leaps made by the authors based on small focus groups in one VA hospital in a rural area of one state within the US.

Finally, given the narrow scope of the study, I suggest that the title be revised to indicate that the study is based on HCPs' perspectives only and reflects the situation in one state only, not all of "America" as the title currently suggests.

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.

Yes

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.

Not relevant to this manuscript
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