Reviewer’s report

Title: How to Come to Terms with Facing Death: A Qualitative Study Examining the Experiences of Patients with Terminal Cancer

Version: 0 Date: 19 Aug 2018

Reviewer: Melissa Bloomer

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript for possible publication in BMC Palliative Care. My comments and suggestions are as follows:

Page 3:-

-line 3 you state that 20.4 million people need palliative care. The significance weould be better explained if you provided the percentage of the total population, rather than just an absolute number.

-line 20, is reference [4] actually meant to be Backer? Or Buchman?

-line 38, remove the first name of the author, and check spelling; you state Buckman in text, but Buchman in the reference list.

-line 50, the statement relating to patients encountering increasing difficulty in doing what they were previously able to do etc. This is also true of patients with cancer who are not yet terminal. You have not adequately differentiated how the terminal patient is different

Page 4:-

-line 6, please provide a reference to support your statement about the use of psychiatric oncologists and then provide an explanation of how this is similar or different to 'psychosocial oncology' mentioned in the subsequent sentence

-line 21, please define 'mental stability' as this is integral to your study

-line 35, please explain what is meant by 'vague confusion or ambiguous chaos, which are not identified as evidence spiritual pain…' This does not make sense
-line 52, what do you mean by 'nurses to assess patients' psychology'? Do you mean that nurses assess a patient's mental health? Are palliative care nurses in Japan trained to do this? If so, how? Is a validated tool used to assess mental health? This is not clear. It would also be valuable to state what role palliative care nurses have in mental health care.

Page 5:-

-line 13 you state that the findings will be applicable to other countries and cultures, but will reflect the influence of East Asian culture. It is important to explain what is meant by East Asian culture, and who this typically includes. My perception of East Asian culture is that it may include China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, Korea etc, and some of these countries are developed and others are developing. Furthermore, there may be distinct differences between cultures, and differences in perceptions, attitudes towards, and acceptance of dying and death. Palliative Care as a discipline may also not be the same. So if the authors wish to make this claim, it needs to be justified.

-line 18, the aim is written in a way that it is positively skewed. It assumes that cancer patients DO reach mental stability. A positively skewed aim will impact the results.

-line 30, further detail is required to explain what is meant by 'qualitative descriptive research with reference to phenomenology'. Justify the method chosen and why it was necessary. Otherwise, why not just qualitative descriptive research, or phenomenology?

-in the participants section, I would like to point out that many patients are admitted to palliative care units at all stages of the disease progression, not just the terminal phase.

Page 6:-

-line 23, I note that unstructured interviews were used with a common opening question. That is fine, but you need to state if there was any other way in which you guided the direction of the interviews. Was a list of guiding prompts used? Was there a list of predetermined questions used for when the participant ran out of things to say?

-line 33, did you reconfirm consent at the commencement of each interview? Did any participants die before data collection was complete?
-line 33, it states that one participant was interviewed for a total of 517 minutes. That is more than 8 hours. It begs the question, how did you determine when a second interview was necessary, or a third, or a fourth? Did each subsequent interview commence with the same beginning question? Surely taking up 8 hours of a dying person's time needed to be balanced against the potential for what limited time they may have left. Did you have ethical approval for this degree of interviewing with each person?

-In the ethical considerations section, I think it is also important to note what mechanisms were in place to protect the interviewee who was entering people's homes.

Page 7:-

-in the analysis section, please remove all reference to 'we' and replace with third person language. The analysis approach needs further explanation. Was there a second researcher involved in analysis to insure credibility?

-Were interviews conducted in Japanese? If so, what process was used to translate the quotes included in this manuscript to English? Did you use a process of translation-back translation?

Results:-

-I would encourage the authors to consider shortening the theme names.

-for each quote, please denote which participant it came from. For example, you can use brackets at the end of the quote like this: (Participant 3, interview 2) to denote it was your third participant, and their second interview. This adds to the credibility of the data and allows the reader to determine the diversity in responses and quotes selected amongst the 33 interviews)

Discussion:-

This section could do with some refinement, and improvement in the writing. Please also be sure not to assume that terminology and ideas, perhaps common to Japan or other east Asian cultures will be understood by an international audience. For example 'the non-moving body' is not a term used in Western writing, and I am unsure if this is a culturally influenced term, or poor grammar. Shouganai could also be better explained.

Conclusion:-

The conclusion is weak, and is more of a summary of themes than anything else. What is essential in a conclusion, is a clear statement of how this research contributes to the scholarly evidence and debate on the topic. It must clearly justify the importance of this research and how
is value-adds. You may also make clear recommendations for further research, practice and education. For example, how will these findings change the care provided to terminally ill patients?

Editorial issues:

Please write numbers less than ten as words, so '1' should be replaced with 'one'

Check referencing as there are some errors

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

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

Acceptable
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