Author’s response to reviews

Title: Examining constipation assessment and management of patients with advanced cancer receiving specialist palliative care: A multi-site retrospective case note review of clinical practice

Authors:

Sonja McIlfatrick (sj.mcilfatrick@ulster.ac.uk)
Deborah Muldrew (d.preshaw@ulster.ac.uk)
Esther Beck (e.beck@ulster.ac.uk)
Emma Carduff (Emma.carduff@mariecurie.org.uk)
Mike Clarke (m.clarke@qub.ac.uk)
Anne Finucane (Anne.finucane@mariecurie.org.uk)
Lisa Graham-Wisener (L.Graham-Wisener@qub.ac.uk)
Philip Larkin (Philip.Larkin@chuv.ch)
Noleen McCorry (n mccorry@qub.ac.uk)
Paul Slater (Pf.slater@ulster.ac.uk)
Felicity Hasson (f.hasson@ulster.ac.uk)

Version: 1 Date: 11 Jun 2019

Author’s response to reviews:

"Examining constipation assessment and management in specialist palliative care: A multi-site retrospective case note review of clinical practice" PCAR-D-19-00079

Thank you for taking the time to review our submission. Please find below our response to your queries.

Comment: Title: as a reader I would like to know what population the study portraits to, when reading the title. I would add "advanced cancer patients" in this section

Response: The title has been updated to include “advanced cancer patients”

Location: P1, L2
Comment: Abstract: When I read the methods in the abstract I have no idea what sort of variables were collected. Would it be possible to add a few examples of data collected in the study? Alternatively, authors could add the information described on page 9, lines 9, 10. Regarding the conclusions in the abstract, I don't think it is appropriate to start with the sentence "The nurse plays a key coordinating role in assessing constipation; however, involvement and roles of the wider MDT varies." Perhaps it could start with the answer to the research question posed in the aims, which in my opinion, is the second sentence in this section.

Response: Thank you for this suggestion – the information from page 9, lines 9-10 have been added to the abstract and the lines in the conclusion have been switched around

Location: P3, L10-11

Comment: Introduction: page 6, lines 21, 22 it reads "...questions exist around their implementation and impact in clinical practice.". What questions are those? Are those about difficulties of implementation? Barriers of implementation? Factors which facilitate good implementation? I suggest authors to look at literature around implementation of oncology guidelines in clinical practice, e.g.: Peterson 2011 doi:10.1053/j.seminoncol.2011.03.005. and describe some of those questions, which are relevant to this report. Also, authors could add references on the topic. Furthermore, I believe it would make the discussion more robust, especially in page 16, line 4 where it reads "Possible reasons for variability may be attributable to perceived..." and in the conclusions section, page 19, lines 22-24, where it reads "...it is vital that SPC settings consider ways to support the implementation of documentation strategies to enable transparency of care and maintain good clinical standards."

Response: Thank you for the link to this article and body of work, which we have referenced in text. The questions have been elaborated in line with the broader challenges within oncology guideline implementation. In the conclusion the point is not focused on the implementation of guidelines, but of infrastructure and e-documentation to support staff. This has been reworded to add clarity

Location: P6 L21 to P7 L1; P16, L21; P20, L3

Comment: Design section: why were these 3 sites chosen? Were more sites invited to participate? How was the recruitment process of sites done? Why were only hospices chosen?

Response: We have clarified in text that Data were collected from a convenience sample of three SPC inpatient units associated with one hospice organisation. The sites included represented three distinct regions of the UK, had previously been involved in research projects therefore collaborative links were established, and had expressed an interest in this particular topic.
Comment: Data Collection: how exactly were the data abstractors chosen? By their experience? By their post/rank within the hospice? Because they volunteered? What were some of the criteria to choose them? Regarding sample size, on page 8, lines 5, 6 it reads "On average, 987 patients are admitted to the three hospices annually, of which the literature suggests approximately two thirds may experience constipation." Literature suggests those numbers for those three specific sites? I suggest reviewing the sentence structure. Also, if there is no sample size calculation for a specific outcome, or differences between groups, and authors based their sample size on annual number of patients on those 3 sites, it is imperative that authors explain why and how those sites were chosen.

Response: Thank you for highlighting this; the abstractors volunteered as they were interested in the topic. The sentence on sample size has been edited, removing the phrase “the literature suggests”. Choice of site has been clarified in the previous point.

Comment: Discussion: In page 7, line 24 it is clearly written that "Data were collected in three SPC inpatient units...". It is confusing to read in the first sentence of the discussion section that "This study examined the recorded clinical practices of the assessment and management of constipation for patients with advanced cancer in a SPC inpatient unit, and identified variations within and across sites in one organization..." so was it in 1 organization or 3 organizations that the study took place? Additionally, the report would be more consistent if the discussion section started with the main findings of the study, which appear to start in page 16, line 10, where it reads "Approximately...". I strongly suggest authors to consider this and change the first two paragraphs of the discussion section. The importance of the leading role of the nurse is clear (and expected in the hospice setting, given the UK model) however, I don't think that this should be highlighted before the main results of the study given that authors start the results section with "main findings".

Response: There were three sites from one organization. This information has been added to the section describing the setting. Thank you for this suggestion – we have altered the first two paragraphs of the discussion section to reflect your suggested layout.
Comment: A few typos (not an exhaustive list): Page 7, line 9 "… case-notes notes of…" Page 9, line 21: "Data was…” Page 18, line 22 "…data that was…”

Response: These have been addressed and the document proof read