Reviewer’s report

Title: Volunteers in a biography project with palliative care patients – a feasibility study

Version: 1 Date: 23 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Catherine Walshe

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the revision of this manuscript. It is clearer now, thank you, but I think there are still some areas that require attention before this is suitable for publication I am afraid.

a) The feasibility question(s), aim(s) and/or objectives still need to be much more clearly articulated please both in the abstract and within the manuscript. It is still a struggle to me to understand exactly what elements of feasibility this study aimed to achieve. Whilst you have adopted the reviewers suggested objectives (I note we both identified similar issues with the original manuscript), I think these could be more clearly worded with reference to your original objectives, not those imputed (correctly or otherwise) by a reviewer. This confusion continues through the manuscript where it is very unclear which of your data collection methods maps on which feasibility question(s), and in the language used throughout which is not always one of feasibility. So I suspect you have questions like (and these need to be properly worded please)

i) Can we recruit and train volunteers to deliver this intervention (data collection - completion of training and volunteer interview? How do you know you can scale this up?)

ii) Is the intervention acceptable to patients (data collection - unsure - so perhaps this was not an objective?)

iii) Can the volunteers deliver the intervention safely and appropriately? (data collection - interview??)

iv) Can we collect data to understand the effect of the intervention in quality of life, and is this the correct outcome to measure? How many participants would we need in a full study? (data collection - completion of FACIT-pal??)

v) How long does the intervention take to deliver, and is this time appropriately spent?

etc. There may be others, some of these may not be your objectives, but I hope this helps to explain what I, as a reviewer, expected to see in this manuscript. This needs to be a thread running through the entire manuscript guiding the sample size required to meet these objectives, the data collection needed to answer your questions, and the analytical approach.

b) Unfortunately I still found the intervention to be underspecified. I quite understand and appreciate that there needs to be flexibility in the delivery of the intervention, but at the moment this seems under theorised and under specified such that it could not be replicated. I strongly
suggest that the TIDIER guidelines are used as a clear guide to writing a short paragraph describing the intervention.

c) I am not sure that figure 1 is helpful, unfortunately, as this shows the timeline for the project, not the proposed timeline for data collection for a participant. As I reader I would wish to know when baseline data were collected, when the intervention was delivered (and over what time period) and when follow up data were collected. If this all occurs within a week, I still have some concerns that FACIT-Pal may not be the best data collection tool, perhaps? Data on how long the study would take to set up however, is useful to researchers, and should be clearly detailed.

d) I have concerns that you should not be reporting an improvement in FACIT-Pal scores, given the small numbers involved. I would rather that you report any data on completion rates and completeness, any feedback on its use, and whether the data can be used to calculate the number of participants required in any full study.

e) I think your conclusions on feasibility do not fully take account of the negative aspects of this study (e.g burden for volunteers, ability to recruit sufficient volunteers), whilst I can see that this intervention has potential. I would be more circumspect I suspect, and would prefer that recommendations for a full study are clearer.

In summary, I remain interested in this as a volunteer provided intervention, and it clearly has potential. However I think that more attention to detail in the way that feasibility objectives are reported is required before this could be published.

**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.

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.

Not relevant to this manuscript
Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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