Reviewer’s report

Title: Spiritual care at the end of life in the primary care setting: experiences from spiritual caregivers - a mixed methods study

Version: 0 Date: 10 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Simon Lasair

Reviewer's report:

This study presents some good data concerning the value of spiritual care in palliative care provided in primary care settings in the Netherlands. There are a number of clarifications that will need to be included before this manuscript is ready to be published, however.

1. There was no data provided concerning the membership of the various professional associations contacted to solicit participation in this study. The authors acknowledge their sample size was small, quite possibly limiting this study's capacity to reach data saturation. However, there is no indication of how many potential participants were contacted through the advertisements placed in the professional associations' newsletters and other publications. Moreover, there is also no indication of how many professional spiritual care providers work in the Netherlands regardless of their affiliation with a professional association or not. It is therefore very difficult to determine how representative the views of the participants in this study might be among other members of their profession. To help the reader it will be necessary to provide some more of this contextual data so the validity of the findings arising from this sample can be better assessed.

2. It was difficult to determine the extent to which the data from this study will contribute to the larger project the authors mention in the methods section. In its current form the manuscript does not indicate whether there will be a corresponding study investigating how Health Care Providers view spiritual care from their perspective and what they see as contributing to the barriers to referral to spiritual care providers. This may be implied in the study design, but the way the manuscript is phrased does not provide the reader with insight into how this particular study contributes to the larger project, especially regarding the question of how the Health Care Providers view spiritual care.

3. There is currently not enough conceptual clarity around the various topics covered by the spiritual care providers' conversations with their patients. For example, in Table 3 Category 2 there seems to be overlap between the so-called existential topics and the relational topics. It also appears like the definitions of the terms "existential" and "relational" are assumed by both the authors and the study participants alike. This is a potentially dangerous assumption because it leads to the terms being confused and potentially conflated in some areas. To correct this problem I believe it will be necessary for the authors to provide some explicit definitions of the terms they use to define all the various topics covered by the care providers in their conversations with the patients, simply to ensure the readers fully understand how the raw data fits into these topical categories.
4. In the conclusion the authors state that spiritual care adds value to palliative care in primary care settings. I agree with this conclusion, but this has not been demonstrated through this study, especially given that the perspectives represented by the study's sample are solely those of the spiritual care providers themselves. To state that value is added by including spiritual care in palliative care it would be necessary to document the perspectives of patients, family members, and perhaps of other professionals in contrast to a baseline of having no spiritual care. So, while I agree that spiritual care most likely does add value to palliative care, this data only suggests a potential of adding value, especially when correlating this data with the findings and recommendations of other studies. A more modest formulation regarding the contributions of spiritual care providers, I believe, would more accurately represent what the data collected in this study can render.

**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.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

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