Reviewer’s report

Title: Nursing home staff’s perspective on end-of-life care of German nursing home residents: A cross-sectional survey

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Reviewer: Anna Bone

Reviewer's report:

Peer review: Nursing home staff’s perspective on end of life care of German nursing home residents: A cross sectional study

Thank you for the invitation to review this manuscript. This study covers an important and under-researched topic - end of life care in nursing homes. This observational postal survey study achieved a relatively good response rate from nursing home staff in Germany, covering 46% of the country's care homes. However, authors provided little detail on how the questionnaires were developed and there are some potential issues with the questions included in the questionnaire. Some of the questions ask care home managers to estimate the proportion of their care home who died in hospital or proportion who have an advance directive, rather than give accurate figures. Other questions had very limited response options, e.g. respondents were only able to say that end of life care in care homes was either 'rather poor' or 'rather good'. These questions are subjective, and risk of bias is high, particularly given that managers of private or for-profit nursing homes were among the respondents. While the design of the study cannot be changed, I can suggest minor changes to improve the reporting of this study.

Title and Abstract

* Detailing this as a 'cross sectional study', does not convey the study design - please could the authors consider adding 'postal survey' or 'survey' to provide a more complete description.

* The abstract would benefit from the addition of some key information:

  o which care home staff were invited to take part?
  o what were the roles of those who responded?
  o Measures of variability for the results, e.g. standard deviation, range, or interquartile range.

Background
This section would benefit from inclusion of contextual details for an international audience relating to care homes in Germany. What are the different models of nursing homes, e.g. level of nursing provision, how are they funded?

The language used in the first two sentences of the third paragraph page 3 require revision. 'Looking for high quality care is unusual phrasing, and then 'this type of care' is non-specific and confusing. Please revise.

Methods

Detail about how many surveys sent to each care home would be useful. I expect this is one per home but this could be made explicit.

Sentence on page 5, second paragraph - 'All questionnaires were recorded by one researcher...' What is the meaning of 'recorded'? Data entered into a database? This is ambiguous and should be clarified.

It is stated that the questionnaire was based on the HOMERN study and was 'similar'. It would be helpful to detail how the questionnaire was developed, does it use any validated measures, and how was this amended for the purposes of this study.

Please include a justification for why the questionnaire sought estimates of numbers rather than actual figures from the care home records.

Authors state that the questionnaire was subdivided into three different parts but then it is not clear what those parts are. Please address this.

Discussion

I suggest there is greater acknowledgment of the limitations of this study. Particularly the potential for bias due the questions and the roles of the respondents.

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.
Yes

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.

I am able to assess the statistics

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

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