Reviewer’s report

Title: A mixed methods investigation of surrogate end-of-life decisions among older adult partners

Version: 0 Date: 12 Apr 2019

Reviewer: Jonathan Koffman

Reviewer's report:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to paper to review the paper entitled ‘Surrogate inaccuracy is not at odds with simulated intention: a mixed methods investigation both end-of-life surrogate decisions among older adult partners’.

Abstract: Overall, the abstract is well written but I would change the following points. In the background section, I would remove or replace the word ‘significant’ with a large number of end-of-life decisions. I would also replace the word ‘experiences’ with insights followed by making these decisions. In the method section, I would suggest that the authors state that participants engaged in semi-structured interviews to explore their decision-making processes. New sentence should then refer to how the transcripts were analysed thematically. Somewhere in this section, the authors need to refer to the importance of integrating both the quantitative and qualitative components. In the results section, the authors do not refer to how many participants were involved in the study. This is important. Moreover, they do not present any of the quantitative findings. This is an omission that needs to be rectified. In the conclusion section, I’m not entirely convinced by the two sentences presented. More thought needs to go into what the findings imply.

Background section: Overall this is well written on the first page (line 20) I would refer to validity rather than applicability.

I like the section refers to psychological theories of decision-making on page 6 it might be worthwhile referring to the three different theories in parentheses so they stand out to better effect. The authors provide a reasonable rationale for conducting a mixed methods study.

Methods:

In the results section, the concept of quality-of-life is referred to but it is not mentioned in the methods section in relation to how this was examined and understood.

The authors need to refer to what level of significance was considered to be important for the purposes of this study.

Semi-structured interviews: I'm not really clear about what the authors refer to as 'generally open-ended'. This is a rather vague statement.
In relation to the qualitative analysis, it would be useful to explain various steps involved in the thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke. No mention is given to how rigour was incorporated into the analysis of the qualitative interviews. For example, did dual-coding take place? There are clear guidelines on how to enhance qualitative analytical rigour and I would suggest the authors refer to these and state what processes were involved.

Findings: Findings presented clearly. I would suggest the table 1 that the N's are also presented alongside the percentages. Given that the overall number of participants is so small I am actually wondering whether the percentages have much value at all. On page 14 I would refer to qualitative findings as opposed to qualitative analysis. That the same would apply to page 11. I would urge the authors to find better sub-headings for these two components of the study. I rather liked the manner in which the qualitative data is presented. The themes are interesting. To enhance the section it would be useful if the authors could present some contextual information about who is saying what. At the moment I'm left wondering about the relationship of the participant to the relative and I believe this might be quite important in better understanding participants sentiments/insights. Could be summarised with the numerical number in the form of the table. The authors could then refer to those participant numbers within the text or explain briefly the characteristics of the participant without providing too much information so the participants can be identified.

The discussion section warrants serious attention. The authors have presented the findings, quantitative and qualitative, separately. Given that this is a mixed-methods study more thought needs to be given to integrating these two components of the overall study so they form a whole. The authors give no attention to limitations associated with this study. More thought needs to be given to critically reflecting on the manner in which the study took place and its inherent weaknesses which limit the inferences from the findings. I would urge the authors to consider the place of advance care planning in relation to contextualising some of the findings from this research. This would be highly relevant in relation to encouraging people to have discussions about care and the manner in which these discussions are then shared with health professionals.

The conclusions demands far more consideration relation to what are the implications of this research, what remains unanswered by and with future research should focus its efforts. References are presented clearly.

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.

Unable to assess

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

Acceptable

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