Reviewer’s report

Title: The required competencies of physicians within palliative care from the perspectives of multi-professional expert groups: a qualitative study

Version: 0 Date: 27 Feb 2020

Reviewer: Research Square Reviewer 1

Reviewer's report:

PEER REVIEWER ASSESSMENTS:

OBJECTIVE - Full research articles: is there a clear objective that addresses a testable research question(s) (brief or other article types: is there a clear objective)?
Yes - there is a clear objective

DESIGN - Is the current approach (including controls and analysis protocols) appropriate for the objective?
Yes - the approach is appropriate

EXECUTION - Are the experiments and analyses performed with technical rigor to allow confidence in the results?
Yes - experiments and analyses were performed appropriately

STATISTICS - Is the use of statistics in the manuscript appropriate?
N/A - there are no statistics in this study

INTERPRETATION - Is the current interpretation/discussion of the results reasonable and not overstated?
Yes - the author's interpretation is reasonable

OVERALL MANUSCRIPT POTENTIAL - Is the current version of this work technically sound? If not, can revisions be made to make the work technically sound?
Yes - current version is technically sound

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS:

GENERAL COMMENTS:
The paper is based on a project in Finland and the premise globally that in relation to palliative care, physicians should have sufficient competencies in palliative care. The aim of the study is to describe the required competencies of physicians working at different levels of palliative care from the perspectives of multi-professional groups. These groups were working within workshops and the data was qualitative.

There is an adequate review of the literature with 21 papers cited.
A descriptive qualitative approach was adopted. The intention was to simply present a comprehensive summary of the phenomenon of interest. The data came from 36 working groups within 21 workshops. Two hundred twenty-two professionals took part in the workshops, where the majority (69) were registered nurses on a specialist level of palliative care.

Managers were contacted to propose the best informed of their personnel. University teachers acted as moderators for the workshops.

The workshops started with 10 open-ended questions regarding the required competencies of health care. The moderators were available for the purpose of clarifying any questions, but they did not participate in the discussions. The important questions were;

1. What are the required competencies of every physician in palliative care at the general level?
2. What are the required competencies of a specialized physician in palliative care at the specialist level?

There was Ethics approval and informed consent for participants.

The original workshop data was transcribed verbatim and placed into a matrix. The data analysis was thorough and a qualitative content analysis method was used. The number of codes in total was 573 for the general level data and 150 for the specialized level data; in both cases the data was saturated. The data analysis was performed manually, using no software, and so results were provided at a general and a specialist level. Table 3 provides an example of the coding procedure which is very helpful.

The description of the required competencies of every physician in palliative care at the general level included 13 main categories with a total of 50 subcategories which are clearly detailed in Table 4.

Pain management was a particular issue at a specialist level. There is a huge amount of data.

Verbatim comments are provided and illustrate the results.

The strengths and limitations of the study are provided. Importantly, it is reported that because the workshops were organized only once, there was no possibility to ask any further questions and that the transcripts were not returned to the participants for comments or correction.

This study is described as the first study which describes the required competencies of the physicians in different levels of palliative care.

A lot of very useful findings are reported.

This seems an important study with global implications and so a valuable study based in Finland.
Overall, I think this is an excellent and informative study with well conducted qualitative research and subsequent analysis.

I would recommend this paper for publication.

REQUESTED REVISIONS:
None required

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.

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.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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

Acceptable
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