Author’s response to reviews

Title: The effects of add-on self-care education on quality of life and fatigue in gastrointestinal cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy

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0Reviewer reports:

Amal Akour (Reviewer 1):

This is really interesting paper about the effect of add-on self-care therapy on the quality of life of patients with GI cancer. I have the following minor comments.

In the title: Please modify as (The effect of add-on self care therapy ....etc)

In the "Methods" section of the abstract: start your sentence with Ninety one (never start a sentence with a number)

Response:

Title and abstract have been revised as suggested.

Page 3:

Line 8: which represent instead of consist

Line 15: remove the word claims
Line 17: use the word strongly instead of intimately

Line 30: use suffer instead of suffered

Page 4:

Line 12: experimented instead of trialed

Line 17: Among them, (just add comma)

Response:

All the above comments have been revised accordingly in both Page 3 and 4.

Page 5:

Line 8-9: Add a dot after the word (post intervention.) then add a separate paragraph about sample size calculation. Please indicate why did you use 0.5 as the effect size, and what was the dropout percent that was considered for sample size calculations?

Response:

Sample size calculation has been explained in more detail in the section of “Data analysis”, where it is more suitable. And our current sample size was sufficient even after consideration of dropout (3 and 2 from two groups, respectively).

Line 14: use the word assigned instead of designated

Response:

This word has been changed as suggested.

Line 51: why did you repeat sample size calculations??

Response:

We apologize for this confusion and the redundant description about sample size calculation was omitted accordingly, while explained in more detail in the section of “Data analysis”, where it is more suitable.
In the discussion section: Add strengths and limitations of your study, namely, please elaborate on the potential confounders that were not accounted for in your paper and how could you overcome this limitation or how are you going to account them during future studies.

Response:

We appreciated the reviewer’s suggestion, and have added study limitation as follows:

“Notably, the current sample size was relatively limited and large-scale population was warranted in the following investigations, wherein the confounding factors potentially influencing the analytical results should be strictly controlled. In addition, conclusion of this study should also be taken with limitation that, certain variables were not considered, including financial condition, mental and spiritual belief, as well as different interest and motivation level of the participants.”

Table 1: Add the unit for BMI (kg/m2)

Response:

Table 1 has been revised accordingly.

Allover the manuscript: Please be consistent with the use of present and past tense, passive or active tense.

Response:

We apologize for the issue with tenses, which have been corrected throughout the manuscript, where present tense was used to describe established/published knowledge and past tense was used to describe out current findings.

Johanna Hok Nordberg (Reviewer 2):

Thank you for the chance to review this important intervention study! The topic is very important and an evaluation of self-care education appropriate for this patient group. I think it is generally a well-conducted and important study. There are however, major limitations in the description that require major revisions. For example, the intervention and methods are insufficiently described and some of the conclusions stated are unfortunately uncorrect. Please see my specific suggestions for major revisions below:

Background
A main question is if the self-care program addresses only chemotherapy-related side-effects or patients' well-being in general. Since the study uses general measures such as quality of life and fatigue, I think it would be more appropriate to state that the study addresses patients' general well-being including managing chemotherapy-related side-effects rather than 'only' control of chemo side-effects. At least, I think the authors need to elaborate on the difference here and the life situation for these patients' could be further described.

Response:

We agree with reviewer’s suggestion and the statements have been updated to general well-being instead of chemotherapy-related side-effects. The latter predominantly compromised the former in GI cancer patients and was the focus of our investigation.

The idea of Orem, as I interpret it, is not only that self-care should be used in the absence of medical care or the care of significant others. Rather, self-care is an important complement to standard medical care as well as the care provided by significant others.

Response:

We definitely agree with the reviewer’s view about Orem theory, that suggests self-care is not only useful in the absence of medical care or the care of significant others, but also as an important complement to standard medical care, as well as care provided by significant others.

We would like to emphasize that due to the limitation of our interest in single investigation, here we only concentrated on the benefits of self-care in post-chemotherapy population in the absence of medical care. The complementary benefits of self-care in presence of medical care will be an attractive topic in our following studies.

Methods

In the methods it would be good with sub-headings, e.g. Participants, Intervention, Data collection and Measures.

Response:

We appreciate the reviewer’s constructive suggestion and the Methods section was re-organized accordingly.

Please describe the exclusion criteria.

Response:

The description about exclusion criteria was provided in the section of “Participants”.
The self-care education program needs to be described more in detail, the description of content regarding muscular progressive relaxation, distraction and nutrition optimization is not enough. What is its' specific content?, Who did the instruction and how? How did the researchers follow-up on performance of self-care program?

Response:

We appreciate the reviewer’s help and provided detailed description into self-education program in the section of “Intervention”, with appropriate reference as well.

In addition, the questionnaire was collected before and after self-education, respectively, to compare the effect before and after the intervention. This has also been clearly stated in The section of “Data collection and measures”.

Describe the conditions for the control group. What was standard supportive/nursing care?

Response:

Standard nursing care to the control was followed the procedures guidelines in our hospital. Patients in both groups were informed that the benefits from treatment were routine.

Discussion

I think the authors need to elaborate more on the results and the limitations of the current study in the discussion section. For example, what were patients' knowledge and attitude before the program, the implication of the statistical conclusions based on sub-categories in questionnaire rather than overall estimates, describe if or if not you registered participants' own initiative of other self-care methods, limitations regarding the possibly unknown patient performance of what was taught in the self-care program.

Response:

We appreciated the reviewer’s suggestion, and have added study limitation as follows:

“Notably, the current sample size was relatively limited and large-scale population was warranted in the following investigations, wherein the confounding factors potentially influencing the analytical results should be strictly controlled. In addition, conclusion of this study should also be taken with limitation that, certain variables were not considered, including financial condition, mental and spiritual belief, as well as different interest and motivation level of the participants.”

Page 9, line 27 and onwards in the discussion: The discussion is not in line with the results and need to be rewritten since the conclusions are not in line with the study results. For example, On line 53, you state "Our questionnaire revealed that distraction significantly contributed to the
quality of life improvement.". Where was this assessed. As I understand none of the questionnaires described include such a specification.

Response:

We agree with reviewer that we don’t have any data in support of the sole contribution of distraction to the quality of life improvement, therefore, this statement was omitted accordingly.

On line 22-37 you mention that participants ingested ginger and you state that this contributed to reduced nausea. This is is not a correct statement since you did not intend to investigate a causation. Please revise accordingly so that it is clear this was (if so, please also state how this was revealed to the researchers since it is not part of the results) participants’ experience rather than a causative relationship.

Response:

We agree with reviewer that we don’t have any data in support of the causal contribution of ginger to the nausea reduction, and the statement was revised accordingly.

Conclusion

The conclusion is not in line with the results section and needs to be rewritten entirely.

Response:

We are grateful for the reviewer’s kind help and conclusion part has been rewritten to summarize our finding.