Reviewer's report

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

Version: 0 Date: 23 Jan 2019

Reviewer: Johanna Hok Nordberg

Reviewer's report:

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.

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.

Methods

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

Please describe the exclusion criteria.

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 performace of self-care program?

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

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.

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.

Conclusion

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

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.

No

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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