Author's response to reviews

Title: Withholding and withdrawing life-sustaining therapy in a Moroccan Emergency Department: An observational study

Authors:

Nada Damghi (damghinada@hotmail.com)
Jihane Belayachi (be_jihane@yahoo.fr)
Badria Aggoug (badria_aggoug747@hotmail.com)
Tarek Dendane (tdendane@hotmail.com)
Khalid Abidi (abidikhalid@invivo.edu)
Naoufal Madani (naoufelmad@gmail.com)
Aicha Zekraoui (aichazekraoui@hotmail.com)
Abdellatif Belabes Bencherou (a.benchekrounbelabes@chis.ma)
Amine Ali Zeggwagh (aazeggwagh@invivo.edu)
Redouane Abouqal (abouqal@invivo.edu)

Version: 3 Date: 4 August 2011

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear editor in chief:

Many thanks for your decision letter dated 23 Mai concerning the manuscript MS: 4027928155245663 - Withholding and withdrawing life-sustaining therapy in a Moroccan Emergency Department: An observational study]

Many thanks also for the priority you have offered us to revise the work; so we are glad to send you the revised manuscript where the modified and added sentences were underlined. Indeed, we join to this letter our point-by-point response to the reviewers. Thank you again for your support concerning our study.

With best regards,

Prof. Redouane Abouqal

Here are the responses to reviewer Hans-Henrik Bülow:

**MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS**

- **Comment 1:** You never refer to your table 2 in the text. Maybe you should add a few words to explain the content of the table in the results section?.
  - **Response 1:** I refer to table 2 in the text in **line 26 page 6**, I add this sentence: “Criteria used to justify limiting life-support therapies for patients who died in ED were reported in table 2”

- **Comment 2:** Page 8 line 1. Reference 19 is not the correct one here.
  - **Response 2:** The correct reference here is reference 7; **line 3 page 8**
• **Comment 3**: Table 1: In the first column you have “all”. In the second column you have “WH/WD total”. The 3rd column is WH, but the 4th column should then only be “WD”
  
  o **Response 3**: The content of the last column in tables 1 has been modified.

• **Comment 4**: Table 3: you have the same error. The second column should just be WD.
  
  o **Response 4**: The content of the second column in tables 3 has been modified.

• **Comment 5**: You may take my next comment as a suggestion which you can use if you choose so.
  
  - On page 8 line 28 you write “We observed obvious ethical limitations in the life-sustaining treatment decision making processes. First, the figure of nursing involvement in 89% of the cases. Etc I definitely do not see this as a limitation, the figure is higher than in previous studies and an interesting observation, because this is (as you note yourself) something which is recommended. Also I find your explanation interesting that young doctors lean on (get support) from the more experienced nurses.
  
  - In my opinion you should just have this whole section (from line 28 on page 8 to line 2 on page 9) in the discussion before starting on ethical limitations. ------- and the last sentence should then be:
  
  o **Response 5**: your suggestion is interesting, and I use it
This sentence: “The figure of nursing involvement in 89% of the cases was surprisingly high, previous studies from Europe have much lower figures [8, 22, 32]. This high rates, could be related to the relatively young age of our emergency doctors (mean of age: 32 years), who benefits from the nurse experience 50 years on average. Generally, the ED staff did not feel prepared for caring for the dying in the ED. Nursing staff relied on learning from others and experience [23]. Many US papers have recommended participation of the nursing staff in ethical decisions [21, 39, 40].” Was removed from ethical limitations and placed in line 30 page 8.

Formerly, in page 8 line 30, and actual, in line 2 page 9: The first word in the sentence “Although” was deleted.

DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS

- **Comment 1**: Page 10 line 10 limitations. I do not think that having only a 6 month period without seasonal variation is a limitation. You may have a somewhat different uptake of patients at other times of the year, but the ethics and morale and religious influence will always be the same, so I think you can delete that.
  - **Response 1**: This limitation has been deleted.

- **Comment 2**: However, I have something else I believe you could add – and I could suggest the following text, and this item is also worth considering if you do a multi-center study. The staff at the ED was not aware of this study at the initiation. But since we did interview the MD’s after each death, this could possibly have influenced the answers during the study, since those
interviewed at the end of the study now knew which questions they were asked. This may be one of the reasons for the high proportion of nurse involvement, since the MD’s knew they would be asked this question. In fact you could test this hypothesis if you know which of your answers were early and which ones were late in the study period – and you might find an increase in nurse involvement as the study proceeded.

- **Response 2:** It is a non-negligible and probable hypothesis; I add the sentence that you propose: “The staff at the ED was not aware of this study at the initiation. But since we did interview the MD’s after each death, this could possibly have influenced the answers during the study, since those interviewed at the end of the study now knew which questions they were asked. This may be one of the reasons for the high proportion of nurse involvement, since the MD’s knew they would be asked this question” in the limitation section, page 10 line14.

- **Comment 3:** In fact you could test this hypothesis if you know which of your answers were early and which ones were late in the study period – and you might find an increase in nurse involvement as the study proceeded.

- **Response 3:** We have tested this hypothesis, and we have not found an increase in nurse’s involvement.