Reviewer's report

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

Version: 2 Date: 20 July 2011

Reviewer: Hans-Henrik Bülow

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I would like to start by repeating my self. This study is interesting because it is one out of very few originating from a primarily Muslim country.

Also I would like to ad that the language and grammar has improved substantially.

Now that I understand how the study was done (interviewing the doctors after each death) I only have few comments.

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS

You never refer to your table 2 in the text. Maybe you should ad a few words to explain the content of the table in the results section?

Page 8 line 1. Reference 19 is not the correct one here.

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”

Table 3: you have the same error. The second column should just be WD.

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: Many US papers have recommended participation of the nursing staff in ethical decisions [21,39, 40] . And delete the first word in the sentence “Although”
DISCRETIONARY REVISIONS

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.

However, I have something else I believe you could ad – and I could suggest the following txt, 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.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I have no competing interests

Kind regards
Hans-Henrik Bülow