Reviewer's report

Title: The death of a patient: a model for reflection in GP training

Version: 2 Date: 20 April 2010

Reviewer: Brian Kelly

Reviewer's report:

Firstly the issue of appropriate review of the research by an ethics committee continues to needs further clarification. In my opinion the aims, the methodology and the intended outcome of the research would usually require ethics committee review particularly in research of this highly sensitive nature. The authors have sent helpful reference documents. In my opinion on reading this information the research aligns with the behavioural research section of the relevant organisation.

Further comments include the following.

1. Methodology. The structure of the sample remains somewhat unclear. Essentially this study is of the majority of participants who were doctors recruited through the Royal Dutch Medical Association as SCEN Doctors (13 of the 21 who agreed, of whom 4 were interviewed individually and 9 in a group). It is unclear why a small group of four from the original 21 were randomly chosen to be interviewed. An additional 4 GPs were recruited from other sources. The statement was made that they were selected to compliment other participants. The explanation for this is unclear and the procedure for matching a participant requires clarification. Reference is made on page 25 to two practices being selected: it is unclear how this relates to the overall methods. Reference to the minority groups represented in those practices is unclear also in its relationship to study aims and methods.

2. The results overall are organised in a clearer fashion although it would be improved if the “doctor-patient model” was presented after the findings from the analysis of the interviews given the model rests upon these findings. Currently the organisation of this section is somewhat confusing.

3. The table summarising the themes is overly detailed and does not assist the presentation of the findings in my opinion. The terminology is at times too general (such as reference to ‘beautiful’ and ‘environment’ as examples that don’t convey to the reader the specific nature of the that subtheme). The table could be deleted without sacrificing important messages within the paper.

4. References are made to the finding of a relationship between the age of GP’s and various themes (eg p 16 older GPs were identified as emphasising the impact of the personality of the patient upon them). It is unclear how age was dealt with as a variable in this analysis and the criteria used for defining ‘older GP’s’.

5. In regards to the limitations of the study the nature of the sample needs to be
more clearly articulated. In some respects the study could be described as a study of SCEN doctors and their experience with dying patient rather than general practitioners as a group. Within the limitations sections there was also reference to ‘doctors did not feel that there education had been incomplete’ this reads as excessively speculative as this was not explored in the paper.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests