Reviewer's report

**Title:** Effectiveness of the ACA training programme on general practitioner-patient communication in palliative care; a controlled trial

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 11 February 2013

**Reviewer:** Paul Van Royen

**Reviewer's report:**

This is a nice and well developed article – it addresses a relevant problem - communication in palliative care.

1. **Is the question posed by the authors well defined?**
   The question posed by the authors is defined as follows: ‘ if GPs exposed to a training programme in GP-patient communication in palliative care, would raise more issues and become more skilled in their communication with palliative patients’ Some elements of this question remain unclear such as the issues raised- does this correlate with a better GP-patient communication and with a better palliative care. The quality of the communication is defined by the scores on the six items and the verbal dominance. This last item would rather be a indicator of a patient-centred communication. It is necessary that the authors explain these aspects and their interrelationship in the introduction of the article

2. **Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
   It concerns a controlled trial.
   The authors should motivate why they took 0.5 SD (only 1 extra issue discussed by the GP). Is this a relevant difference in this context- and why ?
   The risk of bias should be discussed more in depth. All other details of the methodology are sufficiently described.

3. **Are the data sound?**
   This article reports about a relevant problem. Is this study really an effectiveness study – regarding the feasibility for implementation and the non-naturalistic setting. Since there is little known about the effectiveness of training GPs in specific elements of communication in palliative care, wouldn’t an efficacy study more appropriate?

4. **Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?**
   Yes, it is clearly written and

5. **Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?**
   The discussion is supported by the data. It is very worthwhile that a study with a negative result is reported.
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
Because of no randomization, there is a risk of bias, this should be discussed more in depth.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Why use an abbreviation as ACA in the tile – it is not clear in this way

9. Is the writing acceptable?
yes

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I have no competing interests