Author's response to reviews

Title: Evolution of the model of palliative care in the perinatal setting: a review of the clinical literature

Authors:

Albert Balaguer (abalaguer@csc.uic.es)
Ana Martín-Ancel (amartina@hsjdbcn.org)
Darío Ortigoza-Escobar (jortigoza@hsjdbcn.org)
Joaquín Escribano (joaquin.escribano@urv.cat)
Josep Argemi (jargemi@uic.es)

Version: 2 Date: 11 July 2011

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for your enlightening suggestions regarding our manuscript entitled “Palliative care in the perinatal setting: a review of clinical literature”, in your mail dated 27 June 2011. Below, we summarise the major points that the Medical Editors and Editorial Board proposed, and then explain the corresponding changes that we have made to the manuscript:

1. Include a more detailed explanation of the inclusion and exclusion criteria;
2. Clearly outline the quality standards used to evaluate the literature selected for the systematic review;
3. Ensure that the manuscript adheres to the PRISMA checklist for systematic reviews;
4. Discuss any limitations inherent to the review.

In the first part of our article, we sought to determine the best model for perinatal palliative care (PC). We performed a systematic review with the strictest of standards, although, as the reviewers pointed out, we did not explain these standards. Please note that, in the new version, we have clearly specified the standards that we used. This information can be found in the Methods section, in the paragraphs entitled “Criteria for including studies in this review” and “Selection of studies” This information addresses the Editors’ points 1-3, above.

Despite having ultimately found that there are no empirical studies to indicate the best model of care for perinatal PC, we did not simply want to end the article on this conclusion. Instead, we chose to highlight this fact, and then to continue analysing the articles that met some of the criteria (basically, in terms of participants, interventions, and outcomes, but not in design) to show the few descriptive data that exist and to establish the conceptual evolution of the model of care. As such, in the second part of the article, we provide the following:

- A classification of all the articles that we found that meet most of the criteria, regardless of the study design, and that we had previously excluded because they do not meet the requirements for use in a regular Systematic Review;
- A summary of the few existing descriptive data on perinatal PC;
- A description of the evolution of the model of care for perinatal PC over the past few decades, which we composed through consensus methodology.

Thus, for the aforementioned reasons, the first part of our review meets the PRISMA standard, whilst clearly, the second part cannot. Regardless, we believe that we provide a much richer contribution than if we had only written a systematic review. Nonetheless, to avoid confusing the reader, in the title we have avoided using the term systematic review, and simply use review.

In terms of the Reviewers’ point 4, regarding possible limitations of our review, we have highlighted this issue in a dedicated paragraph in the Discussion section.

Lastly, we would like to employ the following new title for the new version, which we feel better expresses the content than does the original one:

“Evolution of the model of palliative care in the perinatal setting: a review of the clinical literature”.

On behalf of all of the authors, I thank you again for your fruitful suggestions and for your time,

Dr. Albert Balaguer