Reviewer's report

Title: Euthanasia and other end-of-life decisions: a mortality follow-back study in Belgium

Version: 2 Date: 26 November 2008

Reviewer: Bjørn Hofmann

Reviewer's report:

The authors describe the prevalence of euthanasia and other end-of-life decisions in Belgium and compare the northern Dutch-speaking and southern French-speaking communities within Belgium. Studies that describe practice in countries that have implemented euthanasia laws (e.g. Belgium 2002) is of great interest both nationally and internationally. So are nationwide studies that make intra-country comparisons.

Major Compulsory Revisions

This study distinguishes between French- and Dutch-speaking parts of Belgium. Although there are obvious cultural differences between these groups, it is not obvious that language is a meaningful categorization. As language cannot be used to explain the observed differences, other underlying cultural differences should be addressed instead. Although the authors suggest plausible underlying cultural factors, the use of language as a key category does not bring the study beyond speculations and closer to an analysis of the observed phenomena.

Moreover, the observed differences in practices in the two study groups may be due to differences in information provided (to the GPs) or in registration practices – independent of other cultural differences.

Minor Essential Revisions

It appears to be a problem (of validation) that the pilot study was performed in a different setting (hospital).

Although GPs were contacted by telephone, it is claimed that the study was anonymous. It is not obvious to this reviewer how this has been achieved.

I would very much welcome studies that investigate different practices with regards to euthanasia and other end-of-life decisions in subgroups in Belgium and other countries. However, the subgroups should be selected not at random or by convenience, but on basis of well formulated hypotheses of relevant differences.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.