Reviewer's report

Title: Prevalence and profile of unrecognised palliative patients in hospitals

Version: 3 Date: 23 October 2010

Reviewer: Rachelle Bernacki

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

Please clarify, pg. 3 Pediatric, neonatlogy and ICU were also not included. Does this include adult ICU? It seems that the adult patients in the ICU would be at high risk of death and I am uncertain why they were excluded? It states it was due to their specific care plans, but that does not make sense to me. I agree that pediatric and neonatology patients should be excluded.

Pg. 4 Please clarify in more detail why the criteria were used (“incurable, progressive, life-threatening disease”) and not a method that had been used previously, such as prognosis of less than 6 months, or the surprise question, which is widely used in the literature.

Pg. 4 The Billings article cited used specific examples of patients, such as pancreatic cancer patients, lung cancer patients etc. Was there any census form A and B from the Billings article? If so, please provide.

Also, is it possible to provide to agreement between the three nurses involved in the study, ie. If three of the RN all evaluated the same 20 or 30 patients, then you could provide a kappa statistic for your method of defining patients (“incurable, progressive, life-threatening disease”) which would improve the scientific validity of the study. Finally, please describe the experience or training of the nurses.

Bottom of pg. 4. Were the interviewers the same as the nurses or different? This is unclear. If different, what was their training and consider providing kappa statistics for them also.

Bottom of pg. 7 give percentage of physicians that refused to participate.

Is it possible to provide mortality statistics of the patients that did not leave the hospital?

It would be better to have a table with the statistics on antibiotics, transfusions, etc. categorized by the estimated prognosis. Consider omitting Table 4, which isn’t that interesting, given that nurses and physicians were about the same (can describe in text).

Minor Essential Revisions

The author can be trusted to make these. For example, missing labels on figures, the wrong use of a term, spelling mistakes.

Top of pg. 4 the palliative unit was not visited
Top of pg. 5 Please change the word exercised. Perhaps ‘piloted the survey under the supervision’?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.