Reviewer's report

Title: Palliative Care in Sub-Saharan Africa: a Systematic Review of the Qualitative Literature

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Reviewer: Richard Powell

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Paper: 'Palliative Care in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review of the Qualitative Literature'

By Marjolein Gysels, Christopher Pell, Lianne Straus and Robert Pool BMC Palliative Care Research article

Recently there has been a growing recognition of the need to advance African palliative care research. Importantly, this agenda has not been developed in isolation from indigenous African palliative care experts. Central to this advancement is the Declaration of Venice, which aims to develop a global palliative care research initiative with a special focus on resource-poor countries.

This submitted paper seeks to contribute to the body of palliative care research on the continent by providing a systematic review of the qualitative research on end-of-life care in sub-Saharan Africa to inform policy, practice and further research.

Using a comprehensive search strategy, the authors identify 51 papers that meet their explicit inclusion criteria. They conclude that research, needed to inform adequate end-of-life care in Africa, is at an early stage and multiple research areas need to be explored.

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There are a number of comments to be made (they are not listed in any prioritised order), listed below.

• Major Compulsory Revisions
  1. Whilst eight electronic databases were searched over a significant time period, I wonder if African journals were also searched (e.g. using, for example, African Journals Online at http://ajol.info). It might be that (i) these journals appear on one or more of the eight searched databases or that (ii) they might not produce any results on the search terms used. However, it would be beneficial to if the authors at least checked out the possibility of that being the case.

• Minor Essential Revisions
  1. Abstract, 1st para: Is 'culturally competent' the correct phrase or 'culturally appropriate'? (Minor issues not for publication).
In summary, this is a very interesting review that makes a compelling case for the need to supplement health research in this field with research that highlights the historical, political, cultural context that influences the way that people approach illness and death to ensure that service models and interventions developed outside of the continent and not simply transplanted wholesale onto it.

Consequently, I would recommend that the paper is accepted if it addresses the points raised above.

REVIEWER GUARANTEE
To the best of my knowledge, I have no conflict of interest in reviewing this paper that might influence the comments I have provided on these pages.

Date: 03/12/2010

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

**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.