Author's response to reviews

Title: Towards a standardised approach for evaluating guidelines on Palliative Sedation: Study Protocol

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

Subject: Manuscript Re-submission: Towards a standardized approach for evaluating guidelines and guidance documents on palliative sedation: study protocol. Version: 3 Dated: 31-03-2014

I am writing in response to your remark: "I would have loved a letter from the authors explaining why they reviewed the article as they did, because I do not think they responded to all my questions raised in my previous report"

First I’d like to thank you for taking the time to review the afore-mentioned and for providing thoughtful and top-quality feedback. We (the authors) chose to conduct this review this way based on the following:

§ Recent studies suggest large and perhaps growing variations in the prescription and practice of palliative sedation, both by non-specialists (generalists and nurses) and in non-specialized settings (i.e. at home and care homes).

§ The authors (members of an international and multi-disciplinary consortium), therefore sought to identify guidelines used for this practice and to systematically review same.

§ We planned to carry out a step-by-step analysis using a “comprehensive” checklist that could cover different salient aspects of end-of-life care.

§ We decided to use internationally accepted and validated instrument. First the AGREE II instrument for appraising the selected guidelines. Unfortunately this instrument as it is, does not analyze items in detail such as “recommendations” made within the guidelines; although these are an important and essential aspect of care for this population of dying patients. To cover this end, we applied a (check-) list of recommendations provided in a widely endorsed document (EAPC Framework).

§ We acknowledge that these two “instruments” are not without their individual shortcomings.

§ We will focus upfront on “guidelines” written in English Dutch and Italian – these being languages we are very conversant with.

§ We will analyze “clinical practice guidelines’’ that have a national/ regional coverage only; as these will presumably be more comparable between countries; i.e. rather than combining palliative sedation guidelines from each and every care setting.

§ We will include “grey” and unpublished literature in our search because we know from an initial search that well-written articles and published documents are seldom the “actual” materials (guidelines) used by practitioners in the field.
To account for guidelines that we might miss during our literature search, we ask members of a known palliative care community in Europe (end-users) to send us copies of their own countries’ or regions’ guidelines.

I hope I have been able to satisfactorily respond to your query.

However, if there is a need for further clarification on this or any other aspect of the protocol, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

With kind regards,
Dr Ebun Abarshi,

on behalf of the EURO IMPACT CONSORTIUM