Reviewer's report

Title: Corticosteroid prescribing in palliative care settings: a retrospective analysis in New Zealand

Version: 3 Date: 17 December 2013

Reviewer: Anna Spathis

Reviewer's report:

This article has been substantially revised following reviewer feedback, and has been significantly improved. Given this, coupled with the size of this observational study, I now feel it does merit publication.

I would like to make a few further minor suggestions:

Minor essential revisions:
- The authors refer to the lack of evidence for steroid prescribing for a non-specific indication in the introduction and discussion. However, there has been a recent, rigorous RCT published in the Journal of Clinical Oncology in Sept 13, which does give evidence for the use of dexamethasone in cancer-related fatigue. (Yennurajalingam et al, vol 31, no 25, p3076).
- On page 6 (introduction), the paragraph referring to guidelines ends with a statement that there should be evaluation for route changes at the very end of life. However, this is not referenced, and looks like the authors' opinion rather than a guideline. This appears to be material for discussion rather than for the introduction.
- In the discussion, the practice of stopping long term steroid if unable to swallow is described as both 'acceptable' and 'questionable' practice. To avoid an oxymoron, the first adjective could be 'common' (or 'usual') practice.
- The discussion could make more of the interesting point that despite only one hospice having a guideline, there was notable consistency in the proportion of patients receiving steroids, and in the doses being used for different indications. Perhaps guidance is not needed? Conversely the wide variation in dose reduction/stopping, could support guideline development.

Discretionary changes:
- It is not necessary to describe the demographics in the text, when they are tabulated in table 5.
- The first sentence of the conclusions would read better if it referred to 'notable consistency' between hospices, rather than a 'narrower range'
- The table 10 legend 'not generally' recorded, should be clarified.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare I have no competing interests.