Reviewer's report

Title: Sedation in palliative care - a critical analysis of 7 years experience

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Reviewer: tatsuya morita

Level of interest: A paper of considerable general medical or scientific interest

Advice on publication: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the compulsory revisions

This is a retrospective study on a large sample of 448 patients during 7 years. The findings could greatly contribute to recent active discussions about palliative sedation. However, the data presentation should be more improved as a formal research paper. I have several major and minor comments.

compulsory comments.

Major:

1 The authors classify agitated delirium and restlessness (possibly means physical restlessness) into the "psychological" distress. But in my understanding, they are usually classified into physical distress in previous articles.

2 As this is a retrospective study, the authors should describe more detailed information about data collection methods: who rated the data? Was any procedure taken to ascertain inter-rater reliability? What criteria were adopted in determining the symptoms were present, "main", or "predominant" ones?

3 The authors did not show many of statistical analyses results. The statistical methods used for comparisons and the true P values should be reported.

4 As definitions is important, definitions of sedation, "patient request for sedation", and each symptom should be more clarified. Possibly the same situations are described as various words without clear definitions, such as agitated delirium (Table 3), restlessness, and cognitive disorders (Figure 2); panic anxiety (text), anxiety (Table 3), and extreme anxiety (Figure 2).

Minor:

5 Please supply the whole number of the total patients in Figure 1.
6 Please supply patient primary diseases in Table 2. The data about all admission would not be always necessary.
7 The authors discuss extensively sedation for existential distress in the Discussion and Introduction, but in the Results, I cannot find the data descriptions (they might be refer it as "panic
discretionary comments

Major:

1 I would recommend the authors to limit their discussions to those that are actually supported by their current data. They give a large amount of discussion to literature review, but this article is not a review article but an original paper. Focusing on several important areas they wanted to investigate could result in more simplification of data presentation and conclusion. Unless the editorial policy of this article recommends to use many figures, Figure 1-4 can be reduced to more smart tables, or the Result section could include more actual data.

2 They investigated intermittent and continuous sedation as a whole. The term terminal sedation (recently many experts maintain palliative sedation seems more appropriate term) generally refers to continuous (-deep) sedation. Thus, separate analyses on continuous sedation would be more useful.

Minor:

3 Could the authors report the hydration practice in more details? They reported only "hydration was continued according to clinical parameters and signs of thirst". Was this for all patients?

4 Table 2, could the authors demonstrate the results of statistical comparisons of patient backgrounds? Age seems significantly different between the groups.

Competing interests:

None declared.