Reviewer’s report

Title: Assessing performance status in palliative care: a version of the Karnofsky Performance Status scale for the twenty-first century

Version: 1 Date: 27 July 2005

Reviewer: sebastiano mercadante

Reviewer’s report:

General

Authors compare three performance status scales at different time points reporting an agreement of 76-85% of ratings, with greatest disagreements at the lower levels. AKPS seems to be more predictive of survival at the lower range of the scale. Authors use a personal paradigm, for example KPS that focuses on the need for hospitalization. This could be disputable, as KPS determines just the functional status and the intensity of care according to these changes, rather hospitalization itself. In fact terminal patients followed at home are not necessarily admitted for that. Substantially, I do not find that the differences in the items among the scales do matter. TKPS uses some different words (professional, and AKPS is a mix of KPS and TKPS. It is not surprising that there was a high level of agreement and disagreement on one level only is expected, depending on the interpretation of who collect data. Indeed, the same subject collected the data of the scales, and this in any case may produce similarities rather than differences.

Selection of patients with pain is of concern, because it is not representative of the entire population. Also a MMSE score > 24 as inclusion criteria does not include most patients with low level of performance score for the purposes of the study.

How was predetermined the number and timing of assessment per individual?

A median score of 60 means that most patients were requiring occasional assistance or professional visits, for what palliative care referrals do not seem to be a strict indication. This embedded substudy does not clear how patients were randomized and for what in the palliative care trial (I did not find data in the literature yet).

What next?: Reject because scientifically unsound

Level of interest: An article of limited interest
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
No competing interest