Reviewer's report

Title: Family meetings in palliative care: multidisciplinary clinical practice guidelines

Version: 1 Date: 10 May 2008

Reviewer: J. Randall Curtis

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General Comments:

1. This manuscript describes the development of a clinical practice guideline for family meetings in the palliative care setting. It is an odd combination of a systematic review of the literature on family meetings, a narrative review of some theories used to develop the guidelines, and a report of original data from a small qualitative study. Nonetheless, it is interesting, novel and adds to the current literature.

Specific Comments:

2. Page 2, abstract, Results: More of the results should be included in the results section of the abstract. This abstract is not informative in its current form.

3. Page 3, second paragraph: It seems odd to me that the authors would use phrases like “sparse evidence” and “dearth of published literature” and then do a systematic review. Perhaps the introduction should be reframed slightly.

4. Page 4, first paragraph: I think the authors should include more information about the methods used to collect and analyze focus group data if they want to include this component in the manuscript. The current level of detail does not allow readers to assess the quality of these data and the findings.

5. Page 4: I think it would be easier for the reader if the authors were to separate the results and discussion sections.

6. Page 5: Reviews are available describing recommended approaches to family meetings in the critical care setting as well and should be included.

7. Results: Consider adding subheadings under the literature review for “palliative care settings”, “geriatric settings” and “critical care settings”.

8. Results: The authors do not address the issue of using the family conference for the purpose of medical decision-making when the patient is unable to participate in medical decision-making. This is conceptually a very different goal of some of these conferences and, when patients do not have decisional capacity, this goal must be combined with the goals of supporting the family described by the authors. It seems to me that the authors should either address this issue or, alternatively if they don’t want to address this issue fully they should
make reference to this issue and describe why they are not addressing it in these guidelines. There are a number of article addressing the theories of shared or surrogate decision-making. An empiric study that raises this issue and cites some of these theoretical approaches is as follows:


9. Results, page 11-12: The authors should describe more of the results of the focus groups if they intend to report the focus groups in this manuscript.

**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.