Reviewer's report

**Title:** Implementation of policies to improve end-of-life decisions in Flemish hospitals: communication, training of professional caregivers and use of quality assessments.

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 29 June 2009

**Reviewer:** rebecca yamarik

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**Major Compulsory Revisions**

1. Page 3, Para. 1: Where you say "countries where specific legislation about end-of-life decisions has been established", does this mean countries where euthanasia has been legalized? Please clarify.

2. Page 3, Para3. Also, a description of the euthanasia law in Belgium as well as the "law on patients rights and palliative care" would be helpful to give context.

3. Page 3, Para 3: "The development of end of life policies in hospitals is a first step towards improving the quality of medical decision-making at the end-of-life." What data is there to link improved outcomes to the existence of policies in hospitals? There is a need to show this link in order for us to care about this paper. What data exists?

4. Page 6, Para 1: What exists in the euthanasia law regarding the decision to perform euthanasia? This context is needed in order to understand the relevance of these policies re: euthanasia among Flemish hospitals. Also, a comparison in the discussion section to the Netherlands and how their hospitals do re: policies for euthanasia would give additional strength to the paper. It would also give the article relevance outside of Belgium.

5. Page 6, Para 4: “a structured approach to palliative care”. What is this exactly? Was there a description of this in the survey?

6. Page 7, Para 2: Given your small numbers, it is difficult to get anything that is statistically significant. However, it would be good to at least give some qualitative differences between hospitals that did and did not give training and education in end of life care.

**Discretionary revisions**

1. Page 3, Para 1: "to oppose or implement new possibilities", this phrase does not make sense

2. Page 8, Para 2: Given that palliative sedation policies and non-treatment decision policies increased so much, is there any data on how often palliative sedation and /or euthanasia occurs in Flemish hospitals?

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

**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