Reviewer’s report

Title: European Association for Palliative Care (EAPC) framework for palliative sedation: a critical appraisal

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Thank you for giving the opportunity to read this paper. This paper presents some interesting thoughts on palliative sedation. Notwithstanding, many questions raised after reading of this text. For the purpose of this review, I will restrict myself to the major items that are of critical importance for this paper (in my opinion).

1. The title of this paper suggests that the recently published EAPC framework for palliative care will be discussed. As far as I know, this is also the only authorized text of the EAPC on palliative sedation. However, this official EAPC-publication is only explicitly discussed on 2 (out of 10) pages, namely in the section on ‘refactory symptoms’ and in the section on ‘intending death’. In the background section the authors state that: ‘we will focus on texts that explicitly set out to make policy recommendations leveled by the EAPC or some of its representatives” (p1). However, my critique is that most of the papers referred to by the authors, although published at the forum site of EAPC, seem intended (by the EAPC) as discussion papers and not as formal position papers. The publication of De Graeff & Dean consists of a literature review and, although supported by an EAPC consensus panel, it does not seem to be a formal EAPC paper also. In my opinion, it is highly problematic to present this collection of papers as a more or less coherent EAPC framework on palliative sedation, as suggested both in the title and in the background section. This is also confusing because there is an explicit EAPC position paper with the word ‘framework’ in the title (the publication of Cherny et al). This raises serious problems for the remainder of the paper. For example in the discussion on terminology the authors wonder ‘What terminology and definitions are actually proposed and used within the EAPC framework of palliative sedation?’ and continue their discussion with citations from other papers. At the end of that analysis they argue that one of the most important tasks of the EAPC seems to ‘fend off any accusations that palliative sedation is even remotely related to euthanasia’. But this conclusion is clearly not retrieved from the official framework publication of Cherny et al. which is not even cited in this paragraph.

2. It seems that the authors want to combine two perspectives in their article, namely to start an ethical discussion on the difference between palliative sedation and euthanasia (1) and to analyze the EAPC framework on palliative sedation (2). As a reviewer, I am of the opinion that the current attempt of the authors to combine these two perspectives is problematic (see also the remarks
above). I would suggest that the authors clearly choose one perspective. The first perspective will require more detailed (ethical) analysis, the second perspective requires a thorough analysis of the EAPC framework publication of Cherny et al.

3. The authors conclude that ‘according to this reasoning, abstaining from shortening the dying process if it contains unbearable suffering is unethical’. Unfortunately ‘this reasoning’ is not very clear to me. Does this imply, according to the authors, that the dying process of patients who suffer unbearably can or should be shortened, regardless of their consent? Also, I do not agree with the suggestion of the authors that the EAPC position that rejects the deliberate hastening of death through palliative sedation does not make sense. For example, I think that many persons, both those who accept and those who do not accept euthanasia, would agree that ´normal´/´standard´/´regular´ palliative care programs should not aim at hidden or slow euthanasia.

4. It is not clear what is meant with the claim in the summary and in the abstract that the EAPC takes ´a less patient-centered stand than what is defensible´. Also, it is not clear how this relates to the conclusions from the autonomy section. In addition, in the summary, I have missed the -interesting- discussion on the relation between unbearable suffering and refractory symptoms.

**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