Reviewers report

Title: The use of opioids at the end of life: a survey of experienced barriers in pain management and knowledge level of physicians

Version: 2 Date: 5 May 2010

Reviewer: Romayne Gallagher

Reviewers report:

This is an important topic and the response rate from physicians is very good. I appreciated being able to read this work.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

In the discussion there needs to be a comparison of your data with other studies done on same or similar issues.

Also a discussion of the conflict between what physicians say they will do and what they actually do. This is seen in your data where they say they are not concerned about respiratory depression yet when titrating the dose they are concerned about it. Some discussion of this needs to occur.

The discussion is also inadequate on the issue of equianalgesic dosing. There is a reason why there is a large discrepancy between conversions and why published conversion tables are different from common experience. For example fentanyl is highly lipophillic and therefore has a longer half life in frail elders than in younger people and this probably accounts for the variation in equianalgesic conversions.

I would appreciate a discussion on the authors opinions of how legal euthanasia affects the knowledge and practice of use of opioids particularly when there are confusions about how opioids shorten life in many of the physicians. How is this affecting pain management?

Minor Essential Revisions:

Limitations of study: please discuss what it may mean when many responses are "don't know" Could it be that the physicians did not understand the question? Also does it add confusion if there are two possible correct answers such as on the equianalgesic conversion?

I did not see nephrologists mentioned in the list of specialists surveyed. Were they included in internal medicine?

You may wish to discuss the implications of 40% of physicians not consulting palliative care yet getting many questions wrong on your survey.

Discretionary Revisions: You may reduce your word count by having editing out unnecessary words throughout the article.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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.