Reviewer’s report

Title: How to develop an evidence-based curriculum in undergraduate palliative care education: a phase II exploratory trial for a complex intervention

Version: 1 Date: 18 May 2012

Reviewer: Christoph Ostgathe

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you very much for the possibility to review this manuscript. The authors of the paper describe results of an evaluation of a palliative care teaching unit for 4th year medical students in one medical faculty in Germany. This assessment was part of a larger project aiming at developing an evidence based undergraduate curriculum for palliative care. Parts of this project have been published elsewhere. The issue of teaching palliative care and its evaluation is of high importance on a national and international level. In Germany the topic is – as the authors describe it right –prevailing as by 2013 the medical schools must teach and examine palliative care. For the evaluation the authors used a translated, shortened and modified set of questions deriving from an instrument out of the “Harvard Program in Palliative Care Education Project” and the revised Collet Lester Fear of Death Scale. Additionally to measure emotional involvement the mDES was applied. Overall the paper offers interesting and worth reading – insight into evaluation of palliative care education. The paper has some weaknesses that the authors should thoroughly address before publication.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Overall the paper would benefit substantially from a more focused and shortened approach. The title already is misleading and promises too much. The focus is the evaluation not the development of the curriculum. So better would be “Evaluating an evidence based .... Taking this focus in the title into account all the to my opinion redundant information – for example the insight into the curr. development with the systematic review should be – to my opinion - left out. Above that the number of participants is so low, that the authors should be honest and take the fact that it is rather a pilot study right into the title.

The method section has to be shortened substantially

Page 2 UPCE should also be explained in the abstract

Page 2 The n´s should be stated in the abstract

Page 4 “according to the self-efficacy concept of Bandura” should not be part of the Background as it describes already the method; same the Trend statement.

Page 4 “via email invitation to suitable 4th year students”? Where´nt that all 4th year students

Page 4 “n=42” ?? In the results you have 43 4th year students. Please clarify.

Page 9 15 students completed the questionnaire in T1; is that equivalent to the
number of participants in the intervention. Was there a drop out during the intervention. How was participation rate during the course. How consistent did students take part. Did you collect causes for drop out

Page 11 Adverse events: “psychological support” this is not described in the method section / description of the intervention. Where they attending the whole teaching unit?

The authors should be - due to the pilot character of the study - more careful with their conclusions. Correctly they state on page 12 that they only can describe “associations not effects”. A few sentences before the authors state that the course has an “does have emotional impact”. I wold rather say “may have…. ”.

Figure 2 Page 18 – delete, as it does not add substantially to the focus of the paper

Table 1 pages 19/20 - delete, as it does not add substantially to the focus of the paper

Table 4 page 20/21 – delete, as it is sufficiently described in the results section

Table 5 delete, as it does not add substantially to the focus of the paper

Discretionary Revisions

Page 2 all p’s should be stated exactly (p=.,..) as long as they are greater that p<0.001

Page 2 / 3 (and the whole paper) language better “increase” and “decrease” than “ros

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.