Reviewer's report

Title: The Role of Advance Directives in End-of-Life Decisions in Austria - Survey of Intensive Care Physicians

Version: 2 Date: 16 June 2010

Reviewer: Lieve Van den Block

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions:
Material en methods: More details are needed:
- some of the questions could be added to make it more clear for the reader what was measured; either in this section or the questionnaire in annex. Eg “The views and wishes their patients had determined in the advance directives had to be listed”: did the physicians answer questions about all patients together or each patient individually?
- If the answers of the physicians are not about 1 case each time, it will be more difficult for them to answer. This then is an important weakness of the study, which should be thoroughly explored in the discussion section.
- Perhaps the authors can also make a distinction between “attitude” and “behavior” questions?

Did the authors study the representativity of the physicians that responded in terms of age, sex, discipline? This would give more insight into how representative the data are.

The discussion of the paper entails several paragraphs of contemplations (eg on children, enactment of law) based on other literature. I would reduce these in length and keep the discussion more focused (and directly related to the results of the survey).

The authors state in their conclusion: “To date, Austrian intensivists still act on the edge of illegality, even if they strictly adhere to the published consensus guidelines regarding end-of-life decisions”. This should be explained more thoroughly in the discussion section. Which results lead the authors to this conclusion?

Minor Essential Revisions

Abstract: please mention year of data gathering

Conclusion of abstract: “To date, Austrian intensivists are still acting on the edge of illegality, even if they strictly adhere to the published consensus guidelines regarding end-of-life decisions.” Cannot be derived from the data presented in the abstract. I would advise to stay close to the results section of the abstract
when writing the final conclusion.

Results section: “The median of ICU-admissions per year was 400 and the median of ICU mortality was at 10%.” How was this measured for the participating ICUs? To be added in the methods section?

Why not give all frequencies and % of the number of physicians confronted with ADs? Now the authors only show >= 1 and below and above 10.

**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