Reviewer's report

Title: Anaesthetists' and surgeons' attitudes towards informed consent in the UK: a cross-sectional study

Version: 1  Date: 18 August 2009

Reviewer: Hassan El-Wakeel

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

I am puzzled by the aim of the research. Surgeons or any other medical professionals performing an invasive procedure are all bound by the same consenting process. The medical professional advising or performing the invasive procedure is the one whose attitude is interesting to researchers. I am not sure how proving a difference in opinion between surgeons and anaesthetists would change or improve the process of consent.

The closed questionnaire seems a valid instrument when there is a lot of published data with regards to the main question. However, I have not seen any indication of literature search leading to choosing these questions based on published data. I would like to know what are the sources these question were based on, as this raises a big question about the validity and reliability of the main measure used.

A five-point Likert scale was used. I have two reservations here. It is recommended not to use an odd number to avoid having a midpoint, as many people may choose it. Also, the authors chose to exclude the midpoint answer from the statistics, so we do not know how many chose point three and what they thought it meant, i.e. partially agree or disagree or don't know. This is obviously evident from the results table showing 10-20% of answers missing, without telling us whether these were excluded answers or missing answers.

The sample size was chosen based on a difference of 35% of disagreement on consent basics. I do not know how you arrive at the 35% disagreement using 28 different questions, each in a different group asking a different question, with a general 5% possibility of finding significant difference between groups in any research if you ask so many questions.

Confidence intervals are becoming a norm in statistical analysis, and none were included in this study; only p-values. There are no correlational analyses between question-groups or within groups of questions or between anaesthetists and surgeons groups answers.

It is customary in the discussion to compare results with published data, to check the reliability of the results, and this has not been done.
The conclusions indicating a difference between surgeons and anaesthetists is not backed by the results or by the graph that show very minor differences.

My own opinion would be to change paper to an observational study of opinions of both British surgeons and anaesthetists with regards to consent, or just concentrate on the two main questions posed in the methods section Q 1 and 6 table 4, both of which show no significant difference, based on the original question and piloting.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests