Reviewer's report

Title: Inapplicability of advance directives in a paternalistic setting: the case of a post-communist health system

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Reviewer: Leslie Whetstine

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Major Compulsory Revisions
While there is some interesting information contained within this article, readability is poor given the language barrier despite apparent attempts to remedy this problem. In addition, I am not satisfied that the authors have adequately addressed my criticisms from the first review beyond a few perfunctory sentences that do not clarify the issues.

This article requires a substantial commitment on behalf of the reader and I am still uncertain as to the authors' main thesis even after reading it several times. The first paragraph is an example of the conceptual confusion that appears throughout. The authors state that forgoing treatment when a patient isn't clearly dead is anathema to [virtually] all Albanian practitioners, paramedics and laymen. However, they continue in the same paragraph to claim that "do not intubate me" is a frequent request. If forgoing treatment isn't an option nor a desire, it seems odd that such a request would be frequently made.

Throughout the article the authors claim that Advance Directives are not a viable option in the Albanian culture since practitioners are not in a position to comply with end of life decisions. In the summary, however the authors argue "the situation is even worse when relatives hold ambivalent positions or contradictory ones (i.e. when one relative of the patient demands treatment withdrawal and a second one insists on the continuation of treatment)." If Advance Directives are unavailable and clinicians do not have the legal right to stop treatment unless the person shows signs of death, it is unclear how relatives could make any substantive demands, regardless.

The authors discuss the notion of amanet and suggest it could be used as a type of Advance Directive although it is not clear how or why this would be the case in a culture that seems by their own admission to be 'death denying.'

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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