Reviewer's report

Title: Untapped ethical resources for neurodegeneration research

Version: 1 Date: 30 January 2011

Reviewer: Philip Candilis

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting survey of researchers in neurodegenerative disorders. Their views on research ethics and the barriers to ethical considerations will be of interest to those in the growing field of neuroethics, to research ethicists, and research administrators alike.

Major compulsory: The presentation would be much clearer with greater attention to the writing itself. It is often characterized by dependent clauses that interrupt the authors’ points and the flow of the writing (e.g., in the Abstract's first sentence). I am not troubled by the representativeness of the survey sample; 193 surveys from researchers in this small field is a good start, and is adequately addressed in the discussion of weaknesses (a strength of this submission).

More references for the general comments in the Background would meet the standard of publication (e.g., for advances in the root causes of illness, therapeutic directions, and the many investigators who are optimistic). Mixed metaphors in this section could be addressed as well (i.e., intersection, landscape, upstream). The final two sentences of the Background are better suited for Results (i.e., "We found... "However, they reported...”).

For those of us with less statistical background, explanations of why certain analyses were chosen or significant would be reader-friendly (e.g., why the varimax rotation, the Kaiser rule, the KMO value greater than 0.8?).

Data in the Results can more easily be found in tables, with an emphasis on major demographics a better focus for this section. Otherwise, the detail drowns out the most salient information. The data is strongest when accompanied by qualitative data, namely, specific responses. These would help clarify the different factors found in the data. More information on how the factors were selected or identified would be useful to distinguish them (e.g., indifference vs. lack of interest; concern vs. interest?).

Finally, a tighter Discussion would emphasize the authors' main points significantly. New issues such as cultural appropriateness are not relevant to the Results, and distract from the distinctions evident between research leaders and others, men and women. This may not be the place for broad opinions on structural inertia and partnerships between scientists and ethicists. Invoking a new social contract is certainly beyond the scope of the data. Overall, a stricter adherence to the specific findings and their implications would strengthen the conclusion.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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

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.