Reviewer's report

**Title:** How is organ transplantation depicted in internal medicine and transplantation journals?

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 22 April 2013

**Reviewer:** Fredrik Svenæus

**Reviewer's report:**

This is an interesting and well executed paper about the depiction of organ transplantation in medical journals as concerns ethical matters. The paper is quite ambitious regarding the number of articles that have been scrutinized and the methods used to select and analyze the articles in question are sound and comprehensive. The overarching hypothesis that is tested and corroborated in the paper is that articles about organ transplantation in scientific journals tend to stress the success and importance of the technology and also tend to routinize the procedure in comparison with other strategies as well as downplaying the potential difficulties and suffering associated with being transplanted.

I have three questions/points that I think the authors could benefit from considering before publication. In none of the cases do I find amendments necessary, but the article may benefit from integrating the following points in the discussion.

I think it would have been wise to also consider articles about organ donation in the study, especially given the comparisons the authors make with an earlier study of media articles. Organ transplantation is intimately related to questions of donation in the ethical perspectives and it may be that other points would come through by scrutinizing such articles. This might be an idea for a future study.

I find the scheme of the four prima facie principles from Beauchamp and Childress a rather meager one in considering ethical difficulties in the medical discussion of organ transplantation. What about themes such as vulnerability and integrity, for instance, which are brought up in later editions of Principles of Biomedical Ethics? Since the authors have chosen to also include the category of “patients’ experiences” in the analysis I think they by this move, at least partly, make up for this meagerness of the ethical scheme. If this had not been the case I would have been more reluctant in recommending publishing without major revisions.

One of the major findings in the paper is that internal medicine journals report more ethical issues than transplantation journals. The authors never present any explanation of why this might be so. My guess would be that this simply reflects the division between internal medical doctors and transplant surgeons as representing donors versus recipients of organs. In all previous ethical debates about how and when the terminally ill patient may be considered a potential
source of organs and not only a patient being treated for his/her own sake, this division has been quite clear. The transplant surgeons (transplant journals) are always stressing the potential benefits of transplantation whereas the internists (internal medicine journals) are guarding the rights of donors and their relatives. Maybe this history and quite natural division of interests between professions deserve to be mentioned in some way in the paper?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests.