Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Baburao Koneru

Reviewer's report:

Questions posed by the authors
1) Whether portrayals of organ transplantation in medical literature is similar to those in popular press

2) Whether Fox and Swazey’s analysis (routinization of practice, overidealization of its potential results, triumphalist attitude of professionals, nonchalant attitudes regarding the exchange of gift, massive financial investment in transplantation versus other fields of healthcare and general reluctance to consider the inherent...)

The report may be important to the overall field of transplantation by its attempt to provide a different perspective for transplant professionals and care providers regarding how their scholarly output and its style are perceived. Similarly, it suggests that editors and publishers of journals that deal with transplantation should reexamine their current publication practices.

Given the implications, the manuscript, in its current form does not fully support the authors’ claims.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) Authors’ question 1

Based upon their finding of many uncertainties in the reported literature that differs from the authors’ earlier report of Quebec newspapers where the only uncertainty was related to waiting for an organ the authors raise the following questions in the Conclusion section “Do professionals and physicians play a role in this discrepancy? Does the greater number of success stories in newspapers reflect the medical and transplant community’s desire to promote organ donation?
Do the authors have any evidence to suggest the above? For example, have they participated in any interviews given by transplant professionals to journalists in Quebec or elsewhere? If they had not, and there is no published evidence to support their questions, then they are theoretical. If so, should the authors not raise questions about the newspaper publishing and journalistic practices which may have a role in this?

2) Routinization of organ transplantation:
In the final paragraph of the 'vocabulary used' subsection of the Results section, the authors imply that because several advances and improvements have occurred in the field of transplantation contributing to its success they disagree with the use of terms “common place, standard of care,---------, established therapy”. In fact, transplantation is very common, and is considered standard of care and is an established therapy. It is considered so by third party payers including federal healthcare agencies.

Towards the end of paragraph 2 of the Discussion section, the authors’ question, incorrectly in this reviewer’s opinion, whether transplantation should be considered routine therapy “considering all the issues related to the transfer of an organ from one person to another?” What would those issues have to do with whether transplantation is routine therapy or not?

Finally, in Background section, paragraph 2 the authors themselves state that organ transplantation is widely accepted.

The authors need to provide a working definition of routinization of a particular form of care and present arguments as to why transplantation would not fit that definition in their opinion.

3) Arbitrary evaluation and conclusions
A. The authors state that patients’ feelings were reported in 5.7% and 1.6% of internal medicine and transplantation publications and uncertainty was addressed in 8 and 11% of publications, respectively.

In the final paragraph of the Discussion, the authors comment that few articles address the issue of uncertainty related to transplantation which, in this reviewer’s opinion, is inconsistent with their results (8% and 11% in internal medicine and transplantation, respectively). Did the authors formulate metrics/thresholds, a priori, to determine whether each qualitative domain addressed by them had met or not met those criteria?

B. Journals’ policies
Based on their finding that only 6.6% of articles in transplantation journals covered ethical issues the authors state in paragraph 3 of the Discussion section that the two journals in this field are not meeting their stated missions.

On what criteria do the authors make such assertions? Is their conclusion based entirely on the comparison with internal medicine journals?
Discretionary Revisions

1) In paragraph 6 of the Methods section, while addressing the qualitative data that are examined, the authors identify ethical issues, vocabulary used, certainty/uncertainty and patient experiences. In the qualitative analysis subsection of results their description does not follow the same sequence. Similarly, while addressing ethical issues in the methods, paragraph 6, they mention autonomy, justice, beneficence and non-maleficence whereas in the results the order is different. It would be easier for the readers if the authors follow one sequence both in all sections.

2) Methodology: 1995- 2008 as the study period – would it not be appropriate to examine reports published in later years to obtain a more ‘current’ sample of the publications?

3) What was the rationale in the choice of 349 articles out of each specialty group? Also, while the 349 represent 31% of the 1120 articles in medicine they comprise only 7.5% in the transplantation field. This introduces problems in sampling