Reviewer’s report

Title: To Evaluate the Effectiveness of Health Care Ethics Consultation Based on the Goals of Health Care Ethics Consultation: A Prospective Cohort Study with Randomization

Version: 1 Date: 30 August 2013

Reviewer: Antony Tobin

Reviewer’s report:

This is an interesting study that looks at an area of significant importance. In general it is well written. I do however have some major concerns.

Major Compulsory revisions

1. There is no reference to there being Hospital Ethics Board approval for this study. How were the ethical concerns regarding denying a clinicians request for a HCEC review handled. Was there informed consent for the patients/patients families? If not explain why you think it was justified to waive informed consent in this instance where the treating clinicians requested a specific intervention for their patients.

2. How was the randomisation performed – this must be included in the methods

3. You state that length of patient survival was not different between the groups but you do not present any data. The mortality between the two groups is similar but it is hard to believe that the survival is not different given the differences in length of stay and the high mortality. This must be clarified.

4. One of the major outcomes was whether consensus was reached and you defined this in the methods as “any of the morally acceptable options suggested by the ethics consultant was followed”. This does not mean that consensus was reached and I am not sure how you could do this without interviewing the patient/family and the doctors/nurses. Also how did you define consensus for the control arm that did not have an ethics consultant opinion? This needs to be better presented.

5. You do not present a breakdown of the reasons for referral to the HCEC by treatment group. This is necessary to determine if there is confounding and it should replace the current Table 2

Minor Essential Revisions

1. You use Elixhauser as a measure of severity of illness - it is not an acute severity score but a co-morbidity score. This need to be clarified in your manuscript

2. You present non-normal(skewed) data like length of stay as mean+/-SD and
use test for normal distributions (t test). Skewed data like length of stay should be presented as median+/ SD and a nonparametric test like the Kruskal-Wallis test or Mann-Whitney test used to compare groups.

3. The final paragraph on page 10 is incorrect – it mixes the percentages for nurses and physicians up

4.

Discretionary Revisions
1. The discussion is too long and could do with some editing
2. There are some spelling/grammatical errors that should be attended to – I have highlighted these in the marked copy of the pdf.

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 declare that I have no competing interests