Author's response to reviews

Title: Ethical challenges in surgery as narrated by practicing surgeons

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Dear Editorial Staff,

First we like to thank the reviewers for providing us with useful suggestions for revisions of the manuscript. Attached please find a copy of our revised article "Ethical challenges in surgery as narrated by practicing surgeons". In response to the comments by Kathleen M Oberle, the following changes have been made:
1. Use of field notes added on page 8
2. The language in the literature review is changed to make it less definitive as most of the literature about ethical challenges in surgery is conceptual. We refer to the research-based literature by underlining that that they are studies.
3. The English language has been revised by Fulbright Scholar Marjory Schaffer, University of Oslo and Assistant Professor Stewart Clark, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim.
4. The use of "relation ethics" is corrected to "relational ethics". A description of an action ethics perspective is added on page 3. Hopefully the distinction between action and relation ethics perspectives has become clearer.
5. We are asked to clarify why this paper is about "ethics" and not just about "being a surgeon" or how the surgeons spontaneously talked about ethics. The surgeons in this study were asked to narrate about one or more ethically difficult situations they had experienced as surgeons and to reflect on their experiences of being in these situations (that their reflection on their experiences were sought, is added on page 8). The surgeons did not distinguish between "being a surgeon" and "ethics" in the interviews. They said that they "experience ethically difficult situations as an important part of their everyday activities that cannot be separated from the rest" (page 15). The surgeons did not differentiate between an action ethical and a relation ethical perspective in their reasoning. This is an analytical distinction made by the authors in order to structure the results (page 10). The authors' interpretation of the meaning of these interview texts was that ethics seemed to be important to the surgeons' identities. The focus of the phenomenological hermeneutic method used in this study, inspired by Ricoeur, was to interpret what the transcribed interview texts talk about (utterance meaning), not just what the interviewees' says or talk about (utterer's meaning) (added on page 9). The philosophical foundation of this phenomenological hermeneutical method for researching lived experiences has been described in detail by Lindseth & Norberg 2004 (Reference nr. 39 in the manuscript).

In response to the comments by Donna M. Romyn, the following changes have been made:
1. The discrepancy in the description of the manuscripts on page 6 and 9 has been corrected.
2. The analysis was conducted by the team as a whole and the interpretative agreement was considered satisfactory and to be the most useful understanding of the meaning of the surgeons' experiences of situations of ethical difficulty (Added on page 9).
3. The identical sentences on page 18 and 22 were not intended by the authors and have been corrected.
4. No efforts were made to validate our interpretations with the participants. The interviewees' meaning is in focus if the interpretation is returned to the interviewees to validate or increase the credibility of an interpretation. In this study, the focus was on obtaining the meaning of the text, which cannot be validated by the interviewees in the same way. A kind of validation is accomplished by the structural analysis as the objective part of the interpretation process, according to Ricoeur (Added on page 9-10).
5. The results from the interviews with ten registered nurses (RNs) working in surgical units are in progress and will be addressed in a third paper (Added on page 7). The authors have no intention to compare the findings between the nurses and the surgeons. The aim of this comprehensive study is rather to increase our understanding of the meaning of being in ethically difficult situations as experienced by male and
female members of different professions who are working in different health care settings.

With these changes, we hope that you will find this manuscript acceptable for publication. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,
Kirsti Torjuul