Reviewer's report

Title: Patients Attitudes Toward Advance Planning in Japan: How to Respect Patients Best Interests.

Version: 1 Date: 21 May 2006

Reviewer: Kei Hirai

Reviewer's report:

General
It is very appreciated that the authors tried to resolve difficult ethical issues in medical decision making using an excellent sampling survey method. However, there seems to be a lot of insufficient arguments for convincing the readers of the importance of findings of the research. Further detailed analyses of the data or comprehensive discussions of related articles seem to be needed.

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Major Compulsory Revisions
1. Title: The sample of the survey was general population. So the title should be not the "Patients' attitudes..."
2. Introduction: There is no clear statement about the purpose of the survey. The author must clearly state the purpose and its rationales of the survey. The introduction part of this paper seems to be fragmented. The author seem to fail to indicate clear rationale and purpose of the survey. For example, what is the reason for conducting the research with the general population in order to clarify patients' preference for active and life-sustaining treatments and to claim the importance of legislation for advance directives in Japan?
3. Methods and Results: One of main purposes of this article seems to prove the differences of preference for each active treatment and life-sustaining treatment (Tables 3 & 4). If so, and in order to support the authorsâ€™ arguments and to make a clearer conclusion, it is essential that the authors conduct multivariate analyses with a mixed model with the independent variables that contain (1) the difference of the three scenario groups as the between-group-design and (2) the differences of the treatments as the within-group-design.
4. Discussion:
   Line 235: Because the sample of the survey was not actual patient sample, the argument is overstating. In addition, there was no clear rationale to support the argument. The survey only revealed that general population have high preference for making advance plans but only a small percentage of them actually have them. It seems that this evidence does not imply patients' need for support in making advance plans. Another data or evidence is needed to claim this point.
   Line 247-249: The sentence is not clear. I would like to know which data or substantial reasons support this argument.
   Line 264: This argument is not fully supported by the results of this research.
   Line 271-274: This argument is not sufficiently supported by the results of this survey or any other substantial reasons. Therefore, if the authors would like to discuss this point, they need to refer to at least some articles that support the authorsâ€™ view.
   Line 275-293: Although the paragraph indicates that the types of scenario affect advance planning, it is not clear how these results support the authors' arguments.
   Line 313-316: The reader may have difficulties understanding this paragraph because it lacks explanation for the authors' arguments. In addition, I'd like to know what the word â€œnaturalâ€ mean.
   Line 318-331: The conclusion of this paragraph, â€œit is suggested that there is little difference in patientsâ€™ preferences regarding treatment preferencesâ€œ, seems to be supported by other articles. The authors should clearly indicate the relationship between this conclusion and the results of the survey.
5. Conclusion: I could not read any clear conclusion from this research.

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Minor Essential Revisions
Line 74: The author should indicate some examples of the "outcome."
Line 167-175: The author should note the reason for setting the cut-off point of age as 53 years old and the GHQ total score as 25. If there were no clear reason for choosing these cut-off value, these variables should be analyzed as interval variables.
Line 258: Is the sentence grammatically correct?
Line 309: "This may due to" should be "This may be due to."

Discretionary Revisions
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.