Reviewer’s report

Title: Extensions to Regret-based Decision Curve Analysis: An application to hospice referral for terminal patients

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Reviewer: Charles Normand

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This paper makes a useful contribution to understanding of the decision problem around referral to hospice care and describes a tool that may assist decision making. This is still preliminary work, and the authors do not make unreasonable claims for the work reported here.

There are two limitations to this work that are not discussed in detail. First, the problem that is being addressed is in part the consequence of the (generally undesirable) requirement under Medicare to make this choice. It is increasing understood that palliative care thinking should start earlier than 6 months before death in many cases, and that there can be a prolonged period during which there is overlapping intent between potentially life extending and quality of life enhancing goals of treatment. The choice is peculiarly American for the substitution to be so marked. Having said that, the choice that is being supported with this system is real for many people who are approaching the end of life in the US. Second, the model does not adequately take account of the different degrees to which a focus on palliative services will impact on the quality of life of patients. Essentially in cases where the failure to focus on pain and other symptoms that reduce quality of life may be very harmful in the cases of some diseases/combinations of diseases, and may be much less important in others. Thus the opportunity cost of the decision to continue with curative treatment depends crucially on the actual harm this will do to the access to better interventions to manage symptoms. This in turn depends on both the severity of symptoms and the extent to which optimal symptom management leads to better quality of life.

The value of this paper is at least in part the clarity of thinking that is brings, and this can provide a basis for more complete and sensitive decision support resources.

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'