Reviewer’s report

Title: Discussing life expectancy with surgical patients: Do patients want to know and how should this information be delivered?

Version: 1 Date: 17 December 2007

Reviewer: Nananda F. Col

Reviewer’s report:

This well-written paper addresses an interesting topic that is relevant to clinicians. My main concern about this paper is that the figures are somewhat problematic because they mix graphic type with framing effects and varying time intervals. Ideally, each figure should convey the same information, only varying the format. This does not appear to be the case for many of the figures compared. For ex, some of the figures present both positive and negative framing (changes of being alive and dead), but the survival curve only shows being alive. Similarly, some figures are explicit about survival at different time points in the future, where others are not and only appear to capture a single time point (though the exact time point is not mentioned on the figure (e.g., the smiling faces and pie chartsâ##no mention is made as to the time frame involved). Hence it is not clear if the preferences for graphical format really are that, rather than preferences for multiple time points of preferences for framing effects. This limitation should be discussed in the limitations section.

Specific comments:

p. 13: â##The provision of information leaflets, including a variety of presentation formats, increased contact with nurse specialists to reinforce understanding and further education / training of clinicians will facilitate this process.â##

If this has been shown to be true, a ref should be provided. If this is the opinion of the authors, then this should be made clear and it should be toned down.

The discussion should mention a recent white paper written by Isaac M. Lipkus. Hereâ##s the reference:

Numeric, Verbal, and Visual Formats of Conveying Health Risks: Suggested Best Practices and Future Recommendations
Med Decis Making 2007 27: 696-713

Table 1. The legend should remind the reader what the scale means.
The column header â##left educationâ## is awkward and confusing.

Table 2: column 2 needs a header