Reviewer's report

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

Version: 2 Date: 8 May 2008

Reviewer: Nananda F. Col

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General Comments:

This manuscript was quite interesting and presented important findings. The methods were robust, though there is room for improvement in clarity of presentation of major findings and conclusions.

Specific comments:

The results were hard to read because the headers used conveyed no meaning (Section 1, 2, etc). The reader needs to repeatedly refer back to what was being presented by referring back to what each particular section was referring to. This problem could be readily fixed by using meaningful section headers (ie, Preferences for Graphical Format) and inserting an introductory sentence in the beginning of each section in the results.

Page 9, para 1: the phrasing ‘had left…’ is awkward.

P. 10, last paragraph: context for the preference rating (3.3 (1.1) is needed. For example, describe the range, (On a scale of x to y, where x is... and y is ..., the mean preference rating was...

p.11 (and elsewhere) 58% OF patients...

p. 12, para 2, line 8. this sentence is not at all clear (immediate and endpoints....?

p.12, last para. What does realistic perception mean here?

p.13, para 1, last sentence. It is not clear to me how a leaflet could provide personalized estimates of an individual’s life expectancy. The calculation requires information about the patient’s specific circumstances (age, other risk factors). This would presumably require either table look-ups or a software program. More clarity on what the authors intended to say here is needed.

Figure 3 needs a lot of reformatting. It would help if the format were box and whiskers instead of the colored rectangles (the mean is not identifiable on all, and difficult to find on the 2 in which it is displayed. It would be helpful to reorder these statements top to bottom according to frequency in a consistent manner. For ex, why somewhat unlikely falls between almost certain and probable, rather than before it, seems illogical and arbitrary. It also makes the figure very difficult
to interpret.