Reviewer's report

Title: Four minutes for a patient, twenty seconds for a relative - an observational study at a university hospital

Version: 3 Date: 8 March 2010

Reviewer: Linda C Zandbelt

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General comments
The authors did a good job in answering the queries and adapting the manuscript.
The research questions and methods are described more clearly, and Table 1 now provides a better overview of the coding instrument.
I have only a few comments.

Minor Essential revisions
- Background: “Studies researching quantity and/or quality of communication (…) are still lacking”: Since the authors mention a couple of studies in this area in the Discussion section, ‘lacking’ could be replaced by e.g. ‘scarce’.
- Methods: The section ‘Data collection’, p 5, “All their activities were …Table 1.” overlaps with the section ‘Measurement tool’ (first paragraph), and could be removed.
- Methods, section ‘Data collection’, p 5: the authors should provide information on the respons-scale of the questions about physicians’ satisfaction and contentment, e.g.: “In addition, they were asked to rate their satisfaction with their work and their contentment with time for communication with patients and relatives on a 6-point Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (very good) to 6 (unsatisfactory).”
- In the answer to my question 5.2 (Minor essential revisions), the authors indicate that the observer was instructed to change the code when the patient and the intern started a conversation during the treatment. This seems contradictory to their statement in the Methods, Measurement tool (p4), last sentence (“If the doctor was conducting two tasks at the same time, the task he had started first was tested and assigned to the appropriate category”)?
- Methods, Data analysis section: I would suggest to include the information about how the variable Communication time was dichotomized here.
- Discussion, Communication times with patients, first sentence: nowadays there are ample studies on patient-physician communication. Did the authors mean ‘studies on communication time between physicians and patients or relatives’ here?
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: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests