Reviewer’s report

Title: Development of quality indicators for the measurement of the organisation of palliative care in Europe: The Europall project

Version: 3 Date: 24 May 2012

Reviewer: Katja Hermann

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting paper. Congratulations to the authors for dealing with such an important issue. The organisation of care is one of the pillars of defining high quality palliative care. The authors undertake the valuable task of developing a core set of quality indicators which are suitable to be assessed in different countries and different settings.

Still, I want to make some suggestions which will hopefully improve the paper:

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. Results section: I was a bit confused by the paragraphs on QI development. To understand the performed procedure it could be helpful if the authors provide a flow chart for the development of the indicators in addition to the flow chart demonstrating the included/excluded studies.

Maybe you could also restructure the paragraphs since it is not always clear which indicator set is referred to, i.e. 3rd paragraph, last sentence: The 14 excluded QIs mentioned do not belong to the n=110, do they belong to the n=142? What about the other 18 excluded QIs, then?

Wouldn’t it generally be better to include the reasons for exclusion with the statement “resulted in a reduction from 142 to 110 QIs” in the second paragraph? (Discretionary Revision)

2. The manuscript describes that 20 QIs were newly developed (Results, QI development, 4th paragraph). However, Appendix C shows 24 QIs with the description “New developed” – Among the first 15 QI in the appendix (all new developed), no. 1, 8 and 9 are missing in table 4.

As I understood, some of the QIs (i.e. no. 1, 9) are more general QIs (a summary of the following). Do you want to treat them as a single QI or rather as a heading for a group of QIs (which is not measurable in itself)? This should be described more clearly. The QI about bereavement support (no. 8) is completely missing in the manuscript without reasons given. Again, a flow chart might also help.

3. The new developed QIs in table 4 are phrased differently than in the appendix (and than the other QIs). Could you please explain why you used a different wording? It is difficult to measure “should” (as phrased in table 4) – do you have
an approach for that? Otherwise you could use the expressions from the appendix.

Minor Essential Revisions:

1. To get a good overview of the setting specific QIs in table 2 and to follow the description in the manuscript, the setting should be specified in the table.

2. There is a spelling mistake in reference 46 (Pronost et al. 2008): “haematology-oncology”. In addition: isn’t this a French publication (full text) and should therefore have been excluded from the analysis?

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.