Author’s response to reviews

**Title:** Physicians’ experience with end-of-life decision-making: survey in 6 European countries and Australia

**Authors:**

Rurik Lofmark (rurik.lofmark@telia.com)
Tore Nilstun (Tore.Nilstun@med.lu.se)
Colleen Cartwright (colleen.cartwright@scu.edu.au)
Susanne Fischer (fisu@zhaw.ch)
Agnes van der Heide (a.vaderheide@erasmusmc.nl)
Freddy Mortier (freddy.mortier@rug.ac.be)
Michael Norup (m.norup@medphil.ku.dk)
Lorenzi Simonato (lorenzo.simonato@unipd.it)
Brege D Onwuteaka-Philipsen (b.philipsen@vumc.nl)

**Version:** 2 **Date:** 2 January 2008

**Author’s response to reviews:** see over
Reaction on the comments of the reviewers and the editors.

Below we have addressed the comments in a revised manuscript and provided a point-by-point response to the concerns – in bold.

Further to the reviewers comments, as the data is 5 years old, to further consider in BMC Medicine, we will require that you fully discuss in the manuscript the implications, of the results obtained, 5 years on.

We added the following text in the paragraph of the discussion section where we discuss the limitations of the study:
A number of the authors currently work or research in end-of-life areas. Our experience suggests that since physicians sent in this questionnaire in 2003, the question arises whether there are reasons to believe that physicians’ practices have changed since then. Only in the Netherlands, ELDs have been studied extensively since then. [19] It showed that the practice of ELDs remained stable over the years, with the exception of euthanasia, which occurred less frequently in 2005 compared to 2001. The answers to the questionnaire would have been very similar today.

Please also ensure that your revised manuscript conforms to the journal style (http://www.biomedcentral.com/info/ifora/medicine_journals ). It is important that your files are correctly formatted.

Done

We look forward to receiving your revised manuscript by 2 January 2008. If you imagine that it will take longer to prepare please give us some estimate of when we can expect it.

Reviewer's report
Title: Physicians’ experience with end-of-life decision making: survey in 6 European countries and Australia
Version: 1 Date: 22 October 2007
Reviewer: Clive Seale
Reviewer's report:
General
This is an important article describing results from a well conducted international survey. The authors' reputations and publishing history are known to me, and I am familiar with their method. The literature contains no study of this magnitude comparing physicians in different countries according to their experience of ELDs and the factors contributing to that experience, and willingness to engage in ELDs. This is of great interest internationally as countries around the world periodically consider revisions to policies that concern ELDs.
My only hesitation concerns the date at which the survey was done. The authors give no information about this in the abstract or methods section, but in the discussion (paragraph 5 first sentence) suggest that it was done before 2002, which is now some time ago. Could the authors be asked to clarify this point in the abstract and methods section? If the survey was indeed done before 2002, the editors of BMC Medicine may wish to consider whether some comment on the implications of this might be needed from the authors.
The study took place between November 2002 and January 2003 – included in the methods section

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
None, unless the above issues are considered to be important by the editors

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Which journal?: Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

What next?: Accept for publication in BMC Medicine after minor essential revisions

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests

Reviewer's report
Title: Physicians' experience with end-of-life decision making: survey in 6 European countries and Australia
Version: 1 Date: 26 November 2007
Reviewer: Akira Akabayashi

Reviewer's report:

General
In this study, a questionnaire was used to survey physicians from six European countries and Australia about the issue of ending treatment for terminal patients and euthanasia. The data itself is of great value. Please review the following comments and revise the manuscript accordingly.

The study took place between November 2002 and January 2003, which is now included in the methods section

2. Has this study passed an ethics review committee?
In Australia, but not in Europe, because no patients were involved in the study. This is now mentioned in the methods section.

3. Which language was used to create the questionnaire? If multiple languages were used, how were the questionnaires evaluated to ensure that the content was the same?
The questionnaire was developed in English, translated to the national languages and back to English in search of any discrepancies, which is now
4. If possible, include the whole questionnaire itself as an appendix. The relevant questions are appended.

5. In Figure 1, include the reason that questions about euthanasia were avoided in Italy. Done

6. In the discussion, the differences in the results between countries are attributed to differences in religion and culture. More discussion is needed, however, to address the differences between these countries in terms of the legal system, government system, and directives of related academic associations with respect to ELD (end of life decision). For instance, in the Netherlands and Belgium, there is legislation regarding EAS. More discussion and explanation have been included, as well as two more references.

7. The discussion states that important differences exist not only in physicians’ experiences involving ELD, but also in their attitudes towards the issue. Please explain more specifically what types of “attitudes” are involved. The "attitudes" to which we were referring were those outlined on p7, i.e "that every person has a right to decide to hasten his/her death"; and, that "physicians should always aim at preserving life".

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
Typo:
p. 4 line 5 from the bottom: characteristics. attitudes --> characteristics, attitudes
p. 6 line 3 from the bottom: in The Netherlands --> in the Netherlands
p. 13 bottom: (strongly) --> (Strongly)
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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
Which journal?: Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of importance in its field
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions
Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No
Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests’