Reviewer's report

Title: Emergency Department-Initiated Palliative Care for Advanced Cancer Patients: protocol for a pilot randomized controlled trial

Version: 2 Date: 8 May 2014

Reviewer: Andrew Vickers

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1. At what stage is the trial? The authors state:³The 6-week measurement was added one month into the protocol because a large proportion of our first participants died before the 12-week follow-up. The sample size calculation is not replicable. The authors state that they are looking for a difference between 9 days and 4.5 days in terms of time to palliative care. They give an SD of 12 for 9 days, so let¹s be generous and give an SD of 6 for 4.5 days. For a power of 80%, I get a sample size of 70 per group, not 56.

2. For comparison of quality of life data, where there is a baseline score, the authors should use ANCOVA (see Vickers and Altman, BMJ) ³. How are patients who die considered in the quality of life analysis?

3. The statistics section includes two sets of analyses that appear to be highly questionable. It is unclear what question is being addressed by the analyses described in the section starting ³associations between intervention condition². As regards ³Multiple linear regression models will be fit to the data to control for possible confounders², this is a randomized trial, there aren¹t any confounders.