Reviewer's report

Title: Clinical Excellence in Nephrology: Examples from the Published Literature

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Reviewer: Fredric O Finkelstein

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This is an interesting well written paper and I certainly like the idea of developing standards to assess clinical competence. But for the paper to be meaningful, the authors must expand the paper and acknowledge the challenges faced by nephrologists -- the financial pressure to meet "RVU requirements", the burden of documentation, the limitations of establishing good quality care imposed by dialysis facility owners, hospital administrators, and departmental chairman. Otherwise having clinicians strive to meet these "objective" standards will impose an additional burden on nephrologists and further discourage trainees from selecting nephrology as a sub-specialty.

Specific comments:
1. p7: to assess physician communication skills by patient compliance is difficult and will encourage physicians to "discharge" non-compliant patients from their care
2. p.8 the example cited is very troublesome -- one might argue that the physician communication skills were very poor for a 48 year old to refuse care and die -- one might wonder what sort of communication skills did the physician have? How was dialysis presented? Was transplantation discussed?
3. p12 While team base care is great, hospitals and dialysis facilities need to provide the resources to achieve this -- that is often beyond the control of the physician. This needs discussion.
4. p. 15: "passion for clinical medicine": this needs discussion. Many folks are finding it difficult to maintain this passion in the current health care environment. We will never be returning to the "good old days" when it was not difficult to exhibit this passion and implement care as we thought proper. The current restraints on care by hospitals and dialysis facilities, the burden of documentation, the endless requirements that need to be satisfied, etc are making it challenging to maintain this passion.

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.