Reviewer’s report

Title: Advance directives, proxy opinions, and treatment restrictions in patients with severe stroke

Version: 0 Date: 17 Jun 2017

Reviewer: Christopher Klinger

Reviewer's report:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to review the manuscript entitled "Advance directives, proxy opinions, and treatment restrictions in patients with severe stroke". The subject matter is important and (very) timely - especially with regard to severe illness treatment planning and substitute/proxy decision making for patients who are no longer able to participate in the process (due to a severe stroke). An overall contribution to the literature in the field is acknowledged.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. In order to provide further context to an international readership, the Introduction section might be expanded upon under a potential Background heading to include a brief overview on the health care system in the Netherlands and the legal role of advance care planning/advance directives and substitute/proxy decision making there.

2. Furthermore, the concept of autonomy - so central to this study - might warrant expansion and further referencing alongside the Beauchamp and Childress one provided.

3. Within the current word limits, the Discussion section might be enhanced through linkages to further (international) work in the area, e.g., Escher et al.'s 2015 piece on physician's decisions when faced with contradictory patient advance directives and health care proxy opinion and a review on activities toward enhanced advance care planning at the community level such as the Speak Up! campaign in Canada.

4. Please also carefully edit the manuscript further with an eye toward grammar and spelling. Please write out abbreviations such as BI for Barthel Index the first time they appear in the body of the text to assist the reader.

Minor Essential Revisions

5. To assist the reader, the Methods section might benefit from a flow diagram toward patient inclusion criteria as a potential Figure 1. With regard to establishing the patient's decision
making capacity, are there guidelines for assessment in the Netherlands? How many physicians in total were involved with making capacity assessments as part of the study? How can the physicians be sure about the presence of advance directives, i.e., is there a registry in the Netherlands (see item 1 above)?

6. Please consider providing the semi-structured questionnaire regarding the six months follow-up as an Appendix (online, only) to enhance transparency.

7. As part of the Limitations section, please think about discussing the fact that the data utilized dates back to 2012/2013. Has anything changed since then? Why was the judgement of a patient's capacity based on the assessment of one physician, only? Might the study have benefitted from a second opinion (inter-rater reliability)? Please also consider commenting on the relatively small N (60).

Discretionary Revisions

8. Overall, the manuscript might benefit from further referencing throughout to assist the (busy) reader.

9. The Keywords section might be enhanced to include e.g., advance care planning and substitute/proxy decision making.

10. (Physician)-assisted suicide/medical assistance in dying/euthanasia as the potential 'elephant in the room'?

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.
Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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