Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 0 Date: 09 Jun 2017

Reviewer: Gino Bravo

Reviewer's report:

This paper describes the decision-making process, mostly as viewed by the treating physician, for incapacitated patients with severe stroke. 60 patients were involved, of which 49 were incapacitated. Only one had an advance directive, according to the physician. Most treatment restriction decisions followed from discussions with the patient's proxy. Proxies' opinions were based on patients' previously expressed wishes or the best interest principle. This is again according to the physician. A stronger design would have compared the physician's view with that of the proxy, at study inclusion or in the 23 survivors who were interviewed at 6 months. Physician-proxy concordance is likely to be modest at best.

Page 3, line 51: Please define "legal representative" in the Netherlands. Definitions vary across jurisdictions.

Page 4, line 14: On page 11, it is mentioned that the study was approved by the IRB of the initiating center (not of each center).

Page 4, line 29: What do the authors mean by "a semi-structured questionnaire"? Was this an interview guide or a questionnaire? Did it require coding verbatim? The same comment applies to line 45.

Results section: Numbers are a little difficult to follow. A flowchart could be a useful addition.

Page 6, last line "according to their proxies": Is it according to their proxies or to the treating physician? Same comment relative to page 7, line 9-10. The source of the data (physician or proxy) is often unclear.

Page 9, first paragraph: The fact that 2 survivors could not recall having expressed their wishes prior to sustaining a stroke does not imply that their legal representative was inaccurate.

Page 9, line 24: The authors provide an unusual definition of the response shift phenomenon.
Page 9, last paragraph, continuing on page 10: I am not sure of the relevance of describing this 5-step process at the end of the Discussion. Was the approach assessed and found to lead to a better decision-making process?

Overall, the sample size is small and can hardly provide a reliable picture of the decision-making process for incapacitated patients with stroke.

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

No

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

Yes

**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.

I am able to assess the statistics

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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