Reviewer's report

Title: Advance directives from haematology departments: the patient's freedom of choice and communication with families. A qualitative analysis of 35 written documents.

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Reviewer: Joan Liaschenko

Reviewer's report:

I really like this paper. It is a topic worthy of investigation, the responses by subjects are powerful, and the authors' point that all the reasons patients' give in their advance directives should be taken seriously, is an important one. However, it is not ready for publication in its current form. The paper is unclear in several places, not well organized, and could be made stronger if discussed in the context of French law rather than what is done in the U.S.

The methods section is quite muddled. The authors give four phases under the Methods section but they only report data on the 35 patients who filled out ADs. This leads me to ask if this paper is only reporting on the one phase. If they are, they should say that clearly. If not, where is the report on the ADs that were collected from patient charts? There seems to be some confusion between Aims and Methods.

1. It would make for a much stronger paper if the authors' were to situate it in the context of French law on Ads. When I first read the paper, I was struck by such comments as "I entreat you..." and wondered why so many comments take that form. I looked at some literature on French law and ADs, (the references are given below) and learned that French physicians are not bound to respect ADs. How would practice change and care improve if French physicians were to honor patients' ADs?

2. What are the implications for practice and for patient care if physicians were to take seriously that patients use ADs to communicate to their families.

3. Consider a new title, more reflective of the of the findings in the context of French law.

Abstract

The authors state that French law requires that patients be given the opportunity to write ADs to "inform their careers and near ones of their wishes"… What does careers mean?
Method

I read this section several times and still this section is very unclear -- to the point that I had difficulty understanding what you did and what data you were reporting on.

- The first step - Was this internal procedure put in place only for the research or was it part of the hospital's admission procedure? If the latter, why do you refer to it as the first step?

- Where is the data for the second step? If not analyzed yet, tell the readers that it will be presented in a future publication.

- The third step is apparently what is reported in this paper. The 35 participants were those who were asked on admission - How did you know they were alive two years later? In the section, Sample Selection, you indicate the dates within which you collected the archived data (01/04/2006 - 15/04/16: When did you collect the qualitative data?

- If the U.S. is used as a point of comparison, talk about why the French ADs look different. For example, I was struck with how the French ADs so often were expressed as entreaties, which is not something you see in the U.S. That entreaties were frequently the form of expression makes sense if French physicians are not bound to honor ADs. The fourth step was to compare practices between sites but this is not clearly presented.

In summary, this is an important paper with a worthwhile aim, and powerful, qualitative findings. It is, however not ready for publication in its present form. The paper is unclear, poorly organized, and could be much stronger if situated in the context of French law. Doing so would also strengthen the implications of the study. Major revisions are needed before the manuscript is ready for publication.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting manuscript. It will make for an interesting paper when revised and ready for publication.


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