Reviewer's report

Title: Exploring attitudes toward physician-assisted death in patients with life-limiting illnesses with varying experiences of palliative care: A pilot study

Version: 0 Date: 01 Aug 2017

Reviewer: Julia Downing

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting piece of work and very applicable to the field. It is important to get the view of patients on PAD and this is a great start. However due to the limitations of the study I think this should be rewritten as a pilot study, and the conclusions toned down - limitations exist in terms of numbers, length of PC input, unvalidated questionnaire etc. I therefore think it needs some major revisions prior to publication.

Major revisions required
It should be written as a pilot study due to the limitations of the study

Abstract
- You need to include some statistics in the abstract - also put in % e.g. 70 our of 102 participants completed both surveys - what about drop out rate, results etc.
- You should include ethical approval
- I think your conclusions are too strong based on what is really a pilot study
- Background
  - I think the objectives are too big for this study, which is in effect a pilot study due to the size of the sample. The secondary objectives (i.e. determining whether patients are aware that PAD will be legal in Canada; whether patients are comfortable discussing their views on PAD with family, friends, or their health care providers; and which health care professionals patients would want to provide PAD.) are more realistic from this study than the primary objective.
- Methodology
  - In the abstract you mention three groups of patients i.e.: one with new referrals to palliative care; one with no palliative care involvement; and one previously and currently managed by a
palliative care team, whereas later in the text you talk about the third one being prior PC - I think you need to be clearer - maybe it prior/existing palliative care - but it needs to be clearer.

- The time frame is very short - two weeks apart, and those new to palliative care will have probably only had one appointment and we know the importance of ongoing and follow up appointments, so I don't think it is realistic to make conclusions as to the impact of PC on and individuals perspective on physician assisted suicide in this time frame.

- The questionnaire - you use some validated tools e.g. the ESAS and PPS, but your questions with regards to PAD are not validated and I don't think that they are sensitive enough to show change over a two week period i.e. 1) Do you think physician-assisted death should be available to patients with serious diseases, illnesses, or disabilities that cannot be cured and who cannot tolerate their suffering? 2) Given that you have a serious disease, illness, or disability, in the future, would you consider physician-assisted death for yourself? Whilst you mention they are not validated in the limitations this should be expanded and discuss issues re sensitivity to change etc,

- The sample size is small with small numbers in each group - did you do any sample size calculations??

- You should include ethical approval here and not just at the end of the manuscript

- Results

- There should be some discussion re the questions and whether they are sensitive to change etc - was a pilot done before this or is this in effect the pilot? I think the wording of the questions need changing so they are sensitive to change.

- You also ask about whether they would be comfortable discussing their options with family or friends - does this differ if they would like PAD or if they don't want it - it may be easier to talk about it if they definitely don't want it.

- Discussion

- This is very short and should be expanded - there is more to talk about.

- Conclusions

- I think your conclusions are too strong for such a small study, and without ongoing exposure to palliative care.
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.
No

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

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