Reviewer’s report

Title: Using motivational interviewing to facilitate death talk in end-of-life care: an ethical analysis

Version: 0 Date: 21 Dec 2017

Reviewer: Michael Vallis

Reviewer’s report:

This paper is submitted as a debate and examines the ethics regarding the role of motivational interviewing as an intervention for facilitating "death talk" in palliative care.

This paper is well written and the ideas are well thought out. The problem of unprepared bereavement is described and adequately justified as a significant problem. I appreciated how the authors were able to describe the natural ambivalence a provider would experience between treating the patient and addressing the anticipated needs of the bereaved.

The authors do a reasonably good job of defining MI and its components. That being said, I think the main weakness of the paper is how they distinguish MI and decisional balance as separate skills. In actuality they are much more similar than they are different. To an extent the authors position MI as directive and decisional balance as non directive. I would recommend that the authors not position the two as opposed to each other but to describe the principles of MI and the principles of decisional balance and note that decisional balance is seen as a more advanced MI skill. This would allow the authors to focus on the main issue at hand: which are the ethics of directive or non directive interventions from the MI domain? This is the main strength of the paper and it is an important one. MI (which can include decisional balance) is a comprehensive set of skills. In palliative care there are specific ethical issues associated with the way that MI is delivered - nondirective can be risky if it means that the clinician is selectively nudging toward an end that the clinician wants.

There is little to criticize in this paper apart from these comments about MI. As a behaviour change specialist I appreciated this ethical discussion. I think that by avoiding the "MI versus decisional balance" approach the main points of the paper can be conveyed more succinctly.

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

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