Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 0 Date: 20 Dec 2017

Reviewer: Tavis Campbell

Reviewer’s report:

Overall, I think that the topic of this manuscript and consideration of end-of-life counseling style, methods and ethical implications is important and will be of interest to readers of the journal. The manuscript picks up on an often over-looked reality and that is when HCP’s consider biomedical procedures and interventions there is concern to properly inform and not to cause harm but with behavioral or psychosocial interventions, they tend to be judged as benign at worst. The notion that they might manipulate outcomes that might not be in the patient’s best interest or reflect their wishes or create distress is an important consideration.

I have one major concern with the manuscript in terms of the way MI is presented. MI is a counseling style, not an intervention per se. A particular counseling session might include a variety of 'techniques' from a 'grab-bag' of possibilities that have been 'taken' from other therapeutic modalities (e.g. rogerian, CBT, etc). This might include a decisional balance, the OARS methods, 'rolling with resistance,' etc…the list is long. To suggest that MI is 'easier' than decisional balance is, in my estimation, incorrect. It is simply one of the many techniques that can be employed using this counselling style. To put it in perspective, some of the skills required by the MITI for proficiency include delivering 3 complex reflections for each patient statement…this is a great deal more difficult than a decisional balance. In addition, 'decisional balance' MI is not a real thing - it isn't somehow separate as presented. In summary, I think that this is a great manuscript that should consider the elements that might be included in a counseling session that employs an MI style, without dichotomizing and suggesting that discrete categories of MI exist. I would add that what is missing is mention of the difficulty of developing proficiency in this counseling style…sure, it is a teachable, learnable method but most of the literature has no indication of dose, fidelity, composition, etc…and this helps bolster some of the points delivered.

In sum, I would strongly argue that this premise, "...since decisional balance may be more difficult to learn and practise than MI, we advanced that it may be ethically permissible, all things considered, to use MI to facilitate death talk" does not reflect an accurate reflection of the MI counseling style. With revision, I think that this manuscript would make a solid contribution to the literature.

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.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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No

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If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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