Reviewer’s report

Title: The last week of life of nursing home residents with advanced dementia: a retrospective study

Version: 0 Date: 18 Nov 2019

Reviewer: Melanie Handley

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript of a retrospective study of palliative care practices in one region of Italy. My comments are as follows:

Title:
The title is unclear, consider a title that more clearly represents the study.

Abstract:

Page 1, Line 14: I would suggest "geriatric settings" is replaced with something like long-term care settings for older people.

Page 1, Line 21: "NH" change to "Nursing Home (NH)"

Throughout abstract: numbers ten and below to be written e.g. 7 should be seven.

Page 1, line 36: change "was" to "were"

Abstract conclusions: see my comment in the conclusions and implications section. I am not clear that this manuscript has sufficient evidence to link findings to "insufficient acknowledgement of the inappropriateness of some drugs and interventions and health professionals fears and prejudices regarding critical end of life decisions".

Introduction:

Comments for the introduction are related to language. I have made some suggestions for changes below.

Page 2 line 8: The word "decay" should be changed to "decline".

Line 10: "severe disability" could be amended to "increasing severity of physical and cognitive disabilities"

Line 15: Suggest reference to "survive for years" is removed.

Line 20 - 23: "Thus, for most of their residents, NHs are or should be hospices in all respects."
sentence needs reworking. It is important nursing home facilities can to provide palliative care or have access to palliative care service, not that they should become hospices.

Line 25: see above comment on use of "geriatric settings"

Line 32: "lack of communication with relatives who fail to accept the approaching death" should be reworded to something like "lack of communication with family members who are not ready to accept their relative is dying"

Line 35: "lack of competence of non-qualified personal together with a limited number of nurses" consider rewording to something like "non-qualified personnel who have received little training in palliative care and have limited access to qualified nurses"

Line 40: Consider changing "they probably" to "may".

Page 3

Line 16: "staffs" change to "staff"

Line 16/18 "law-defined" could be "regulatory requirement"

Line 36: "loss of all intelligible vocabulary" suggest this is changed to something like "severely impaired vocabulary abilities".

Page 4

Line 14: "like" change to "such as"

Results:

Table 1: Data in row 2 (Age at NH admission) appears to be in the wrong cells.

Discussion

Page 7

Line 16- 19: It is important that appropriate transfers to hospital are not seen as unnecessary for people with dementia. As such, consider rewording "as hospitalization is of limited clinical benefit and for advanced dementia patients it is considered aggressive" to something like "for people with advanced dementia, hospitalization can be aggressive and may be of limited clinical benefit."

Line 29: "showed ample space" amend to "demonstrated scope"

Line 38: "useless" change to "ineffective"

Page 8

Line 38 "drawn up" change to "in place"
Line 38: "some totally unjustifiable resuscitation attempts were carried out" I am unclear how the authors have concluded the attempts were unjustifiable. Please provide further explanation for this statement.

Line 46: "takes a drastic downturn" amend to something like "rapidly declines"

Line 53 to page 9 line 7: I found this sentence difficult to follow, please reword.

Page 9

Line 14-15: "the poor attitude toward implementing advance care plans and the scarcity of guardians and/or surrogates." I was unclear from the data presented, how the authors had arrived at this statement. Please provide additional evidence or clarify how this interpretation links to the evidence presented.

Line 38: "investments for improvement" could the authors elaborate on what they mean by this term.

Line 50: "is" change to "are"

Conclusions and Implications

Page 10

Line 48 "elements that are holding up a" consider changing to "barriers to"

Line 50 - 56: "In particular, insufficient acknowledgement of the inappropriateness of some drugs and interventions, and health professionals' (in particular, physicians) fears and prejudices regarding critical end-of-life decisions". I am not convinced that the data presented in this paper supports this conclusion.

Line 61 Page 11 line 4 "intense changes to NH staff culture and popular culture" This sentence needs rewording and remove the reference to popular culture.

I would like to wish the authors all the best with their submission.
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.

Unable to assess

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

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.
I declare that I have no competing interests.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal