Reviewer’s report

Title: Thai medical students' attitudes regarding what constitutes a "good death": a multi-center study

Version: 0 Date: 13 Aug 2018

Reviewer: Christian Schulz-Quach

Reviewer's report:

Thank you to BMC Medical Education and the authors of this publication for the opportunity to review this submission. It was an interesting read and I feel that with some additional work this manuscript will merit publication in your journal as it sufficiently adds relevant new insight to the literature, specifically, as this topic has a clear Western white middle-class publication bias at present.

Let me start by saying that I am a second language speaker myself and that I have in the past had to revise my own manuscripts multiple times due to translation and language issues. In your manuscript, I find that sometimes your (possible) original meaning of what you are trying to express gets lost in the translation and I therefore urge you to consider using a professional interpretation/language editing service when re-submitting this paper.

You are presenting an observational cross-sectional study design including two centres for medical studies in Thailand. Your cohort consists of all 1st to 6th year medical students and you asked them to anonymously fill in a self-developed questionnaire on palliative care attitudes.

In the following, I will go through your manuscript according to its structure addressing questions and suggestions point to point:

ABSTRACT

1) Your abstract is logically inconsistent. You start of by talking about geriatric palliative care and 'older adults' wishes during their end-of-life period', but your conclusion no longer mention older people at all. It appears to me as if you are trying to achieve too many things in one manuscript. Would it possibly be of help to reconsider what the actual focus of your article is? From reading through it a number of times, I cannot but find that you are focusing on the general attitudes and believes of medical students towards palliative and end-of-life care and not so much on the specifics of palliative care for the elderly. Maybe it would be sensible to then bracket specific mentioning of geriatric palliative care? If you wish to keep the concept in your manuscript, though, please be more specific in how geriatric palliative care has been the focus of your research project.

BACKGROUND

Line 6: "has become a global problem". Difficult wording; I would urge you to reconsider 'problem' - maybe 'public health challenge', 'important task'?

Line 16-20: Is it really only because of those illnesses that elderly patients become more dependent? I don't think so. Please put this sentence in context with geriatric care models.
At this point, I realise that the laid out of your submitted manuscript does not allow for line-referencing because the line numbers are running faster than the actual text. Please correct this in your re-submission.

"Geriatric palliative care is more complicated than adult palliative care because the nature and duration of their chronic illness differ from those illnesses from which younger patients suffer." Please reference this. For an example: https://bmcgeriatr.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2318-10-66

"genuine "good death"" - The whole concept of 'good death' is very contested at present. Please explain precisely what your understanding and definition of 'good death' is. This will be very important for your discussion section later on. Please see here for details and reference: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326838328_The_Nakedness_Of_The_Dead_Body_The_Meaning_Of_Death_To_Healthcare_Professionals_Working_With_The_Dying

Your section on medical students is well-written. You might want to consider a bit more depth in depicting what evidence already exists. See for example here:

- https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4330636/

METHODS
- Please report your study according to the STROBE guidelines (www.equator-network.org). You will need to add this to the introduction of the methods section and you will need to provide an attachment with a table overview of the STROBE structure and how you applied all reporting items to your manuscript.
- Instrument: I think that this is the weakest point of your manuscript. There exist a number of validated instrument for your research question, but you chose to develop your own instrument. That is absolutely permissible, but it would be desirable to hear more about how exactly you developed the questionnaire, how your validation strategy was, whether you piloted it or not etc. This part of your manuscript needs much more strength, but I am confident that you will be able to provide this information. You might wish to refer to the following publication for guidance:

  - https://bmcpalliatcare.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12904-017-0263-3

DISCUSSION
- "The results of this survey reflect the perspectives of Thai medical students regarding palliative care." This is an overly broad statement and you should be careful about over generalisation. I do not think that your study fulfills the requirements for a representative sample. If it does, please provide the relevant evidence for it.
- "This is a point of view that contrasts with traditional Chinese, Japanese, and Korean practices," I think you are making a very interesting and highly important sociological observation here and this needs to be strengthened. It would be very helpful and interesting to readers to see, for an example, a table comparing those different values and cultural norms. This might then be contrasted by other discourse work on the topic such as:
- "To our knowledge, there has been little research conducted about Thai medical students' beliefs as to what constitutes a "good death." This is a very important statement and sentence and it comes much too late in your manuscript. I feel that this would be a way of starting your introduction and focusing on it throughout your manuscript. This is interesting!

- Your limitations section needs further development. You have a response rate of 34%. How do you specifically explain this in your context? What inherent biases might be involved? How did you control for bias?

CONCLUSIONS
- "The results from this study could be used to help improve undergraduate curricula by focusing more on elderly patients at the end of life." This is quite a leap from the data and discussion before. Why the focus on elderly patients? Did you specifically examine the views on geriatric palliative care? Please refer to my earlier comments and try to identify the main focus of your research project before revising it.

I hope my comments will help you to improve your manuscript. Please do not be discouraged and develop your manuscript further, as it is well worth it.

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.

No

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

Yes

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

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