Reviewer’s report

Title: Moral dilemmas and conflicts concerning patients in a vegetative state/unresponsive wakefulness syndrome: shared or non shared decision making? A qualitative study of the professional perspective in two moral case deliberations

Version: 0 Date: 20 Nov 2017

Reviewer: Leslie Francis

Reviewer's report:

Review of METH-D-17-00139

Note: paper not anonymized but I do not know any of the listed authors.

Qualitative study of two moral deliberations involving professions and families w/r to decisionmaking for patients in VS/UWS. Explicitly a pilot. Located in the Netherlands, where AUs report that "physicians are supposed to withdraw life sustaining treatment once recovery is not to be expected." Findings are the need for care in establishing dx, clear vision, uniformity in treatment goals, empathetic communication and understanding of contradictory thoughts.

Both selected cases were ones in which there were serious conflicts between the elder care physicians responsible for the patient and the patient's family. In each case, a "moral deliberation" (a formal ethics case deliberation) was held. Apparently in both cases the families refused to participate in the interviews with the researchers, so the case studies are based on participant/observation in the MD process. Transcripts of the MD process based on handwritten notes were coded using a method designed to limit subjectivity.

As these are second-hand reports about families, it is difficult to know what they indicate about the families' actual visions, beliefs, and experiences. Unsurprisingly, they report differences within the health care team (e.g. nurse reports of responsiveness, disagreed with by other nurses) and within the family (e.g. siblings feeling neglect). Poor communication and lack of transparency among members of the health care team were also reported to be a problem.

These are really two case reports of what was said in the MD process, based on notes. They would have been sounder methodologically had they interviewed the participants or the families. Questions on the data actually used for analysis (the MD hand transcripts): do the notes introduce bias in the themes? Did the structure of the MD process limit what participants thought they could say? How might interviews with the families or participants in the MD process have introduced new themes? More generally, it is unclear how these two reports might generalize, or even what the next steps might be after this "pilot." Some discussion of what this was a pilot "for" might have been helpful.
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.
No

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