Reviewer’s report

Title: Physician workload associated with do-not-resuscitate decision-making in intensive care units: an observational study using Cox proportional hazards analysis

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Reviewer: Samia Hurst

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper reporting a negative association between surgical ICU physician workload and patient DRN orders. It adds to the literature and is nicely done. I have three main comments for the authors:

1) The main result is difficult to assess without knowing a little more about how the difference between high and low work-load would play out in real life. Please explain the functioning of this SICU a little better. Full time attending physicians who treat less than one patient per day seem unlikely if this literally means that there are days when they have no patients. If this is not what it means, then more explanation is required to justify the use of patient number as a measure of workload. Making the justification of this proxy absolutely clear is central of course as this is the main result reported in the paper.

2) The discussion outlines several possible reasons for the reported association. There are at least two more that the authors might consider. First, patients who were assigned to physicians with greater workloads were not identical to those assigned to physicians with smaller workloads in your study. Without a better understanding of the situation in the hospital where the study was conducted, it is difficult to know why. However, these patients may have differed on other variables not captured here. Could one of these variables have been associated with fewer DNR orders?

   Second, patients require the most work when they arrive and when they leave. Physicians with greater workloads may have been acting in a self-protecting manner when prolonging patient length of stay through not writing DNR orders. A pessimistic possibility of course.

3) Finally, since the paper reports what is essentially a side-effect of greater workload, it is a little surprising not to see a decrease in workload discussed as one of the possible solutions in the discussion. Again, a little more detail as to what each sort of workload actually entails would be useful in providing context.

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?
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?
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I recommend additional statistical review

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