Reviewer’s report

Title: Ghent University Hospital's Protocol Regarding the Procedure Concerning Euthanasia and Psychological Suffering

Version: 0 Date: 15 May 2019

Reviewer: Reviewer 2

Reviewer's report:

PEER REVIEWER ASSESSMENTS:

OBJECTIVE - Full research articles: is there a clear objective that addresses a testable research question(s) (brief or other article types: is there a clear objective)?

No - there are minor issues

DESIGN - Is the current approach (including controls and analysis protocols) appropriate for the objective?

N/A - no methodology

EXECUTION - Are the experiments and analyses performed with technical rigor to allow confidence in the results?

N/A - no experiments or analyses

STATISTICS - Is the use of statistics in the manuscript appropriate?

N/A - there are no statistics in this study

INTERPRETATION - Is the current interpretation/discussion of the results reasonable and not overstated?

Yes - the author's interpretation is reasonable
OVERALL MANUSCRIPT POTENTIAL - Is the current version of this work technically sound? If not, can revisions be made to make the work technically sound?

Yes - current version is technically sound

PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS:

GENERAL COMMENTS: This is a paper that discusses the brief history of how one hospital in Belgium has responded to that country's evolving practice parameters around decriminalized euthanasia. The authors speak to a particular set of clinical presentations involving euthanasia requests for unbearable psychological suffering, AND that originate from outside of the hospital (that is, not from one of their own patients).

The hospital under discussion developed a thoughtful process to handle such requests that goes beyond what Belgian law requires, in an attempt to build in additional protections for all parties concerned. The paper is well written and generally covers their issue well. However, the paper might be better classified not as "research" but as something closer to a "case study," "notes from the field," or some other publication category that allows for review and narrative discussion of an important topic. The Figure showing the hospital's euthanasia practice process is helpful.

REQUESTED REVISIONS:

If the intent of the "Is the objective acceptable" criteria is to check if there is a statement along the lines of "This paper will discuss X" I would say strictly not quite, but adding such a statement would be relatively easy to do as it is more or less inferred.

The reader waits until almost the last page of text to find out that the paper appears to be based on a history of seven (7) euthanasia cases of the type they discuss herein. I would like to see that figure and possibly other relevant numerical facts move up in the paper, as I did find myself wondering all along if the authors are speaking in theory or out of actual practice. That said, the authors make no statistical claims that would need to be supported by numbers or numerical analysis, but seeing them does offer the reader some context as to what the clinicians actually experienced. In the same vein, it would be interesting to see their process Figure populated with numbers to see how many requests were made, how many made it all the way through (we are told 7), and how many were denied at any of the several off-ramps.
ADDITIONAL REQUESTS/SUGGESTIONS:

I think the paper could be strengthened by adding in just a bit of background discussion for non-Belgian readers that speak to how euthanasia practice is paid for, or how any other related financial issues are addressed in their hospital's experience.

Note: This reviewer report can be downloaded - see attached pdf file.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

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.

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.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

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