**Reviewer’s report**

**Title:** Relational autonomy: what does it mean and how is it used in end-of-life care? A systematic review of argument-based ethics literature

**Version:** 0  **Date:** 04 Sep 2019

**Reviewer:** Lisa Dive

**Reviewer's report:**

The experience of this referee is in theoretical bioethics and analytic philosophy, therefore the comments made reflect this background. I am not formally trained in the methods of systematic reviews, but have some familiarity with the bioethical literature on autonomy, including relational autonomy.

This manuscript is a systematic review of "argument-based" ethics literature about the concept of relational autonomy in the context of end-of-life care. Overall, in this reviewer's opinion the paper is of good quality and addresses an important topic by providing a comprehensive analysis of relational autonomy, a central concept in end-of-life care. The method of undertaking a systematic review draws out with some clarity certain features of how relational autonomy is conceptualised and applied in this area of bioethics, which is a valuable contribution to the literature. The authors also have an emphasis on understanding the concept to enable its deployment to improve decision-making in end-of-life care situations, which is a positive feature of their approach.

**Paper quality**

The paper is clearly written and well structured.

**Suggestion for improvement**

My main suggestion is that the authors clarify what is meant by "argument-based literature" and defend their focus on this section of the literature.

The term "argument-based literature" is not defined until the methods section on p. 7, lines 26-28, where they explain it as "an article using ethical concepts derived from current or traditional ethical theories". Merely "using" ethical concepts does not make an article argument-based - it needs to use them to make an argument in defence of a position or conclusion.
Additionally, the focus on argument-based literature (sometimes referred to as normative literature, e.g. on p. 5 line 29) requires justification. Presumably there is empirical bioethical literature that makes a relevant contribution to at least the first research question. Indeed, the authors mention that empirical studies have advocated for relational approaches to autonomy (p. 4, lines 27-29). Given the emphasis on understanding relational autonomy to improve end-of-life decision making in real-world situations, it seems that the empirical ethical literature might have something relevant to contribute.

Summary

Overall this paper is of a high quality and makes an important contribution to the literature on autonomy in bioethics and decision-making in end-of-life care. This reviewer's recommendation is to accept the paper, but to request that the authors clarify how they understand "argument-based literature" and to defend the focus of their systematic review on the normative ethical literature.

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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Not relevant to this manuscript

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