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Limitation of life-sustaining treatment in NICU: Physicians' beliefs and attitudes in the Buenos Aires region

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Abstract

Objective: To explore the ethical beliefs and attitudes of Argentinean neonatologists regarding limitation of life-sustaining treatment (LST) for very sick infants.

Methods: We used an anonymous questionnaire including direct questions and hypothetical clinical cases (inevitable demise and anticipated survival with severe long-term disability). Multivariable analysis was carried out to assess the relation between type of clinical case and physicians' LST attitudes.

Results: Overall, 315 neonatologists in 34 units in the Buenos Aires region participated (response rate 54%). Most responders would agree with decisions to start or continue LST. In both clinical cases, continuing current treatment with no therapeutic escalation was the only form of LST limitation acceptable to a substantial proportion (about 60%) of neonatologists. Agreement with LST limitation was slightly but significantly more likely when death was inevitable.

Conclusion: Argentinean neonatologists showed a conservative attitude regarding LST limitation. Patient prognosis and options of non-treatment decision significantly influenced their choices.

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