Author's response to reviews

Title: Anthropometric measures and nutritional state in a healthy elderly population

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The BioMed Central Editorial Team

MS: 4414738977885618: Anthropometric measures and nutritional status in a healthy elderly population

Dear Sirs,

Enclosed is the second version of the referred paper. We would like to explain how we respond to the suggestions and comments of the reviewers.

Reviewer: Mauro E. Valencia

Major Compulsory Revisions

- Table 1 presents the socio-demographic information, but it is not mentioned in the methods section.

The mention was included in the methods section, page 5, line 9.

- It is stated that this study is derived from a national study as a subsample of healthy elderly subjects, however the reader does not have this information. Does it include rural or only urban areas; does it include Indian groups and mestizos from all the regions and in what proportions? With regards to the national representativity. This is very important since the conclusions suggest that the data could be used as “reference anthropometric values” for healthy individuals in Mexico.

The necessary information should be provided in the methods section and the authors should acknowledge the limitations of the study accordingly.

The study is based on a national survey that had as an objective to evaluate the health needs and the health services utilization in beneficiaries over 60 years of the Mexican Institute of the Social Security (IMSS). Certainly the population to which refers is an urban population, as is the case for the population insured by the IMSS. Just as it proposes the reviewer, we have improved the section of methods (page 4), results (paragraph one and two, page 7) and we limit the conclusions to the applicable population (last paragraph page 12).

Minor Essential Revisions

- The term “IMSS beneficiaries” should not be in tables, just in the text and probably substituted by “participating subjects” or similar.

- Throughout the text and title, “nutritional state” should be changed to “nutritional status”

- In the Background section, when mentioning the body composition methods, “labeled potassium” should be substituted by “measuring K-40 by whole body counting”

- In the methods section in the first line “used” instead of “use”.

All the proposed editorial changes were made.
• The authors should consider if repeating percentages in the results is all that necessary, since they are already in the Tables. It is best to focus on the main data with statistical components and just refer the reader to the tables. This will make the article shorter and easier to read.

We try to reduce the information in the results section. nevertheless the presentation of the percentages in this section does not have important changes, since we mention in this section only the most relevant percentages, in that sense, we do not consider that they are repetitive with the tables.

Reviewer: Giuseppe Sergi
Major Compulsory Revisions

Background
• Line 30: The Authors state that “there are no references for the different anthropometric measures in this age group”. This could be true for Mexican people but not in general because there are some papers reporting reference values of anthropometry for the elderly from different countries.

The reviewer was right. The literature is not extensive but there are some international references that must be taken into account although we ratify that there is not Mexican studies of national level that can be used as reference. We modify the last paragraph of the background, page number 1, in order to satisfy this suggestion.

Results
• The Authors find only 1.4% malnourished subjects as determined using the BMI<18.5. They justify these results with the exclusion of ill individuals (diagnosed with chronic-degenerative or acute diseases). Many Authors consider BMI<18.5 inadequate for aged subjects. The Authors should consider the prevalence of malnutrition by using an higher BMI cut-off (i.e. BMI <20). Moreover they should discuss the limits, in the elderly, of BMI <18,5 as a cut-off for malnutrition as well as they focus on the limits of BMI threshold (25.0-29.9) for normal weight and overweight status. A recent paper (Sergi G et al. “An adequate threshold for body mass index. J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med Sci. 2005:866” could be useful for clarify and discuss this point and for reference.

This is probably the most interesting issue presented by the reviewers. After a very serious analysis and a very careful review of the suggested bibliography, we decided not to move the cut point. We seriously think that further studies are necessary in order to validate the cut-off points. We included more arguments in page 9 and 10 of the discussion and in the conclusions.

Minor Essential Revisions
• Please correct the abbreviation of body mass index (BMI not BMC)
Change was made.
• It would be appreciable to include more recent references (only three of them date from the last five years).

The suggestion of the reviewer was taken into account and we include nine new references from the last five years

Hoping that the modifications and comments fill the requirements presented by the reviewers.
Yours sincerely

Sergio Sánchez-García