Reviewer's report

**Title:** Malnutrition and responsibility in elder care - high-level decision-makers' ethical reasoning

**Version:** 6  **Date:** 7 January 2010

**Reviewer:** Ronni Chernoff

**Reviewer's report:**

Major Compulsory Revisions: 1) I found this paper somewhat confusing. Perhaps it is a matter of changing the title to better reflect what is in the m/s but it has very little to do with malnutrition and ethical decision-making. Could you refocus this to address the process of ethical decisions or caregiving responsibilities as these 2 issues are somewhat blurred in the paper.

2) Perhaps I am not understanding why governmental high-level decision-makers were selected - may be a difference in the health care delivery systems but in the US HDMs are not involved in ethical decision-making in health care. It might be useful to explain why this group was selected and whether these people have backgrounds in ethics or health care or are just elected officials.

3) P5, paragraph 2 - was there any reason that you referred only to dementia patients? What about individuals with other chronic diseases who have lost weight?

4) Is there a frequency distribution that indicates the relative weight of the factors identified in Table 1. Eighteen subjects is a rather small number; are there plans to expand the interviews to include more subjects?

5) Can you expand on the "lack of structure" being unethical? To this reviewer this is a management issue and not one of ethics.

6) P18 - methodological issues - were names just drawn sequentially or were they randomly selected or did you use a stratified sample? Can you be more explicit?

7) P18 Are you defining "good" as "not bad"? This is very inferential but should be made clearer.

This is an interesting concept and approach but needs to be focused better either on the decision-making or the malnutrition, unless you are really looking at decisions to not feed patients or residents which I don't think you are.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests