Reviewer’s report

Title: Teaching seven principles for public health ethics: towards a curriculum for a short course on ethics in public health programmes

Version: 4 Date: 11 September 2014

Reviewer: Angus A Dawson

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I think this paper is much improved. The overall project is much clearer and more care is now taken in explaining why various principles are chosen and how they are supposed to interact.

I don’t want to insist on any further changes, and the authors have done a good job of responding to my previous comments, whilst keeping their existing structure and principles. However, I do wish to register that I still find the choice of principles odd. I think it is strange that there is no discussion of paradigmatic public health considerations such as equity, common goods, reciprocity, solidarity etc. The principles presented are little more than a modified form of the four principles. I, and others, have argued that this is hopeless for thinking about public health ethics. I have a particular problem with proportionality as a principle, as this is in essence a methodological not a substantive ethical principle. If the other principles are prima facie principles, they necessarily involve weighing/balancing, so why pick out one type of weighing/balancing (autonomy v benefits - according to Childress et al. as quoted on p.15) for special ranking as its own separate principle? This just looks to be either double counting a commitment to autonomy or introducing an incoherence by prioritising autonomy over others (through this principle) rather than seeing it as a genuinely equal prima facie principle.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

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