Reviewer's report

Title: An Ethical Framework for Cardiac Report Cards

Version: 1 Date: 11 November 2004

Reviewer: David Weimer

Reviewer's report:

General

As someone interested in report cards as public policy instruments, I was happy to read this manuscript. I was also curious about the interpretation of an “ethical framework” and how it differs from the multiple and competing goals that are applied in multi-goal policy analysis.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The authors begin by asserting that they are providing the first such ethical framework for health care report cards. At the risk of being intellectually self-serving, I would like to point out that William Gormley and I offered a normative framework in our book, Organizational Report Cards (Harvard University Press, 1999). On pages 36 and 37, we set out explicit normative criteria for assessing the social desirability of report cards. Specifically, we set out six criteria: validity, comprehensiveness, comprehensibility, relevance, reasonableness, and functionality. Subsequent chapters develop these concepts in depth and apply them to a large variety of report cards, including many in the health area. (Incidently, a prime example of a cardiac report card, the New York State Cardiac Surgery Report, is discussed in the chapters “Assessing Organizational Performance,” which focuses on issues of validity and comprehensiveness including risk adjustment, and “Organizational Responses,” which deals primarily with functionality, including both desirable responses of service improvement and undesirable gaming and goal displacement. It seems to me that the authors should either explicitly reject this normative framework as an ethical framework, or explain how the one they propose differs from it.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

On page 6, it would be helpful to know the three pieces given to respondents.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

I think the manuscript would also benefit from more discussion of the relationship among the principles the authors set out. Are they normatively comparable? For instance, although most of the principles would be interpreted by policy analysts as substantive goals, “Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration” would probably be viewed as an instrumental goal — not something society should...
necessarily view as desirable for its own stake, but rather something that facilitates achieving the other values of “Transparency,” “Legitimacy,” and perhaps “Equity,” though the latter may suffer because of asymmetries in resources of the various stakeholders as well as the problem of unrecognized interests.

Finally, some more reflection on their particular empirical approach to developing the principles would be helpful. I suspect that it is an approach closer to that of the policy analyst, who seeks to recognize all relevant values held by members of society, than the more traditional approach of normative theorists who often work logically from a set of fundamental principles or intuitions.

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I am co-author of a book that deals with the same topic.