Reviewer’s report

Title: Dignity in the Care of Older People - A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature

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Reviewer: Lennart Nordenfelt

Reviewer’s report:

I find this paper to be an excellent contribution to the ethics of the care of older people. It is a review paper that addresses an important problem of interest – the ethical debate about the nature and importance of the notion of dignity – to a broad biomedical audience. It is well argued and well referenced and although it is a review paper, extracting many arguments from the existing literature, it makes several independent and fruitful analytical points. As far as I can see – being a foreigner – the piece is moreover written well enough for publication.

As I said, the authors have drawn a good sample of references both from the philosophical and from the nursing literature. However, there is a point to be made with regard to the reference to Aristotle. This may be a reason for the authors to make some minor addition in the subsequent discussion. The authors rightly note that Aristotle’s Eudemian Ethics lists dignity among the fourteen virtues. Aristotle regards dignity as the mean between servility and unaccommodatingness. Since dignity here is seen as a virtue related to the actions of the subject it could be identified with (or at least subsumed under) the type of dignity that Nordenfelt calls the dignity of moral stature. This kind of dignity is however on the whole neglected in the rest of the present paper. This is understandable since the kinds of dignity which are dominant in the debate about nursing care are dignity of identity and Menschenwürde. However, since Aristotle is quoted there could be a good reason for the authors to demonstrate the relevance of dignity of moral stature also in the nursing context. Some patients show such dignity and ought to be acknowledged for that. More importantly, the health care personnel have a duty to behave in a dignified way in relation to the patients and clients.

In addition to this I have only a very minor question. I cannot understand the insertion of (sic) on p.5 in the manuscript where the authors quote Pullman on an ethic of dignity and an ethic of autonomy.