Reviewer's report

Title: Decision Maker Perceptions of Resource Allocation Processes in Canadian Health Care Organizations: a national survey

Version: 2 Date: 22 April 2012

Reviewer: Suzanne Robinson

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Major Compulsory Revisions

This paper reports a survey of decision makers in Canada, examining how they undertake resource allocation decisions - with a focus particularly on decision makers views on the types and fairness of the processes being utilized.

I enjoyed reading the paper and felt that it had a number of interesting aspects to offer, however I do feel that the current version lacks clarity in a number of aspects and more good be done to enhance the paper and advance the research area.

The introduction argues that resource allocation is central function of health care delivery and that we know very little about how senior leadership teams within health organisations approach this task or about the institutional factors- but it does very little to link this to the extensive work around priority setting and resource allocation – not just in Canada but that carried out in Europe and the US. The paper needs a theoretical framework/s- rather than just a statement that it matters. I think the introduction could do more to set the scene -what do we already know about resource allocation processes and structures. You state in the methods section that the ‘literature was reviewed to identify aspects of priority setting and resource allocation ...which are thought to relate to effectiveness, success or high performance’ – yet you do not mention these in any detail in the paper.

I think the paper needs to be clearer in-terms of defining the key research questions – what are the key areas of interest? This is currently not that clear. The results section - mentions fairness, process and overall rating of process - yet no discussion or explanation of these terms is provided in the introduction or methods sections. There is an extensive literature on fairness and procedural justice that could be drawn on more effectively.

The discussion suggests that the ‘survey enables the investigation of performance and barriers and drivers to successful priority setting’ – yet no attempt is made of how to define or measure success in decision making – the A4R is used in the exploration of the findings but not really referred to in the introduction or methods sections.

The methods section is generally clear but it should contain more information about the content of the survey- how many questions did it pose? how long did it
take to complete? – how did you derive the questions etc etc. At the moment there is no information there and I would suggest highlighting the key themes covered in the survey and making more of the tables – which seem to outline some of the different question areas. This will help the reader to make more sense of the results, which are then reported.

I think more is needed in relation to the pilot – who looked that the earlier version did they go on to be included in the study? - what did you develop change based on the pilot results?.

The results section needs to signal the intended structure more clearly and the narrative presentation of descriptive statistics is verbose. The results section could do with focusing in on the narrative meaning – you mention qualitative free text responses – I think these could be used to illustrate and explore issues. The results as presented are a simple “top down” analysis of the variables from the survey- and very little by way of attempt to provide a more detailed analysis- more cross tabulation, sub group analysis and associations being made between survey variables etc... Overall one is left feeling that more could be done to explore the data and make stronger connections to existing work in this area.

In the results section I think you need to define what you mean by ‘sufficiently complete’ 100% 90% complete?

All the tables and figures could be more useful in helping summarise the findings – Table 1 – needs some further work to make it more useful to the reader, especially the non- Canadian reader. I think it would benefit from more demographic data being included.

Table two – again more effectively used in the main text- also more detail on how are these terms derived.

The results and discussion sections are somewhat disappointing to the reader in terms of their specificity and depth – the abstract suggests that the ‘paper explores findings in greater detail and assesses them in context of the larger literature around what is considered effective practice for healthcare resource allocation’. I think the authors need to be both more specific and explicit in reporting findings and relating these to the extensive lit on resource allocation. The discussion is very superficial and I think it needs to pay more attention to setting the findings in the wider context and really focusing on the additional value of this paper. For example, it mentions leadership but there is limited discussion of leadership in the findings- there is a number of areas that mention culture – what does this mean and how is that impacting on resource allocation. Is procedural justice alone enough to provide a ‘fair’ resource allocation process?

Minor essential revisions

Reference 22 the lead author is Dickinson not Dickenson

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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'