Reviewer's report

Title: Priority setting for new technologies in medicine: A transdisciplinary study

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Reviewer: Tony Hope

Level of interest: not specified

Advice on publication: Other (see below)

This is an ambitious paper that aims to integrate Normal Daniels' account of accountability for reasonableness with observations made from real priority setting processes to develop a fairly abstract model to guide the structure and working of an ethically sound process for resource allocation decision making in health care. Daniels provided four main conditions necessary for a process to come up to the criteria of "accountability for reasonableness". I think the two innovative aspects of the current paper are: first to provide a different structure for these four conditions such that the concept of a rationale is given a more obvious central role; and second, to operationalise the conditions to provide a more practical underlying structure. Thus, Gibson and colleagues link the relationship between the people involved in the decision making and the rationales to Daniels' "relevance condition", and call this aspect "reasonableness". They link the rationales to the overall process and link this to Daniels "publicity" condition and call this transparency. They link rationales to the appeals process and refer to this as responsiveness.

I recommend publication because I think this structure with rationales at its centre does help in clarifying what is required if a real health care system is to make allocation decisions in an ethically sound way. I have a few small comments to improve clarity. Whereas I understood the geometrical configuration of figure 2 (and its relation to table 2) I did not fully understand the geometry of figure 1. In other words I'm not clear why the model should be a "diamond model". First, I would like a little more explanation of how the six elements were derived from the analysis of the documents; and second, what the implications are of their geometrical relationship in the diamond model. For example, is the fact that "people" is situated next to "institutions" and "processes", but opposite (and further away from "reasons") of significance? Or is the model just to emphasise that six different aspects are relevant to the decision making process. If the latter, then I think it is misleading to give it the specific geometrical shape of a diamond. In brief, I would like more explanation of the origin of the six elements and their relationship to each other.

In describing the six elements it wasn't clear to me what the differences were between "factors" and "reasons". Later in the article these two are put together under the term "rationales". However, I did not understand the distinction between them in the first place.
Competing interests:
None declared.