Reviewer’s report

Title: Economic evaluation of an extended nutritional intervention in older Australian hospitalized patients: a randomized controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 12 Jan 2018

Reviewer: Nele Van Damme

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for elaborating your research in more detail, and providing more structure. This really makes your report more understandable for readers not known with health economics.

In general

Language: Please check your text on everyday speech and non-scientific English (e.g. page 11 'Where the ward dietician received referral'; 'and for the sake of maintaining consistency'), as well as sentences which are not grammatically correct [e.g. singular versus plural ('the patient' versus 'their') in the same sentence; conjugated verb and adjective ('… is a simple questionnaire and comprising of …') in the same sentence

Introduction

* I still find your objective too vague. E.g. what do you exactly mean with 'value for money'? Can you describe 'value for money' in more detail (in terms of what?) + from which perspective + what about willingness to pay (cfr your discussion)?

* As it is written now, it seems like your primary objective is to detail the method of your economic evaluation. I guess this is not? Can you reformulate this part of your text?

* I have difficulties with mentioning your primary and secondary outcomes when describing your study objective, as you don't mention the results on these outcomes in your report. If I read about this outcomes in your introduction, I expect to find the specific results (e.g. ICERS) on these outcomes in your report.

Methods

* Page 7: Can you add a paragraph 'design of the study'?

* Page 7, paragraph 2: Can you change 'target population' to 'participants'?

* Can you add the information on the sample size calculation to your method section?
Page 9, paragraph 2, line 10-11: Can you add the manufacturer of the ONS?

Page 9, paragraph 2, line 20: This sentence is not grammatically correct: 'the patient' versus 'their'.

Page 9-10 'Intervention': I have some linguistic suggestions: 'increasing the number of meals they ate'; 'collect information about their recent weight'; 'They The participants received dietetic counseling'; 'In this trial, the dietician assessed the patients as compliant to the nutritional care plan if they …'

Page 10 'Control group': 'Dietetic input occurs only if patients are flagged as high risk of malnutrition and referred by a health care professional with no dedicated outpatient follow-up after discharge.' This sentence reads difficult. Can you reformulate this sentence?

Page 11: suggestion: 'Patients referred to the ward dietician were offered the same nutritional care plan …'

Can you summarise the results of the validity and reliability of the EQ-5D-5L?

Page 14, paragraph 2, line 4: Can you specify what you mean with 'natural units’?

Results

Page 16, paragraph 2, line 14: can you at the unit of measurement (days) to the numbers?

Discussion

Page 18, paragraph 2, line 6: 'In line with best practice guidelines, therefore, our analysis focused on determining the likelihood of the intervention being cost-effective …' Do these guidelines provide reasons why to focus on the likelihood of an intervention being cost-effective rather than on clear numbers (ICER's)?

It seems like very little qaly's were gained: 0.005 per patient. Can you explain, that, although this little gaining, you can conclude that the intervention offers value for money based on your secondary outcome?

Conclusion

Can you specify your primary and secondary outcome, so your conclusion can be read independently from your report.
* Is this conclusion really valid for your secondary outcome 'incremental cost per qaly gained'? It also seems like very little qaly's were gained (0.005 per patient).

* Can you add on which base you can draw these conclusions?

Table 2

* The total DRG costs are the same for the base case analysis as for the sensitivity analysis. Is this correct?

* The total intervention costs are the same for the base case analysis as for the sensitivity analysis. Is this correct?

Figure 3

* I don't understand why there is no difference in the probability of the intervention being cost-effective for the different willingness to pay values.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I recommend additional statistical review

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