Reviewer’s report

Title: Using democracy to award research funding: an observational study

Version: 0 Date: 05 Jun 2017

Reviewer: David Vaux

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The paper by Barnett et al. describes a small (169 respondents) survey in which researchers were asked to nominate 10 scientists working in Australia who most deserve funding.

As the authors say, this was a limited, preliminary study. For example, they made no attempt to ensure that the scientists surveyed were representative of Australian scientists as a whole, and they did not describe how a voting system would actually work. The results of the voting in this study are therefore not to be taken seriously.

However, the authors discussed concerns raised by the respondents, such as whether it would result in a popularity contest, and whether this system could be "gamed". They described the benefits and weaknesses of other methods of allocating funds that would not require detailed descriptions of the research projects.

The value of this observational study is in provoking thought about how research funding could, or should, be distributed, rather than a rigorous test of whether voting is a viable way of allocating funding.

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An article of limited interest

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