

Assessment of the nutritional status of the elderly. Is ambiguity an aesthetic principle?

To the Editor

I have read with great interest the recently published article by Kucukerdonmez et al¹ in the Saudi Medical Journal, and I appreciated the author's efforts and their statistical analysis of data. I also totally agree with the authors that no gold standard tool exists for determining nutritional status. However, I still could not grasp some points in their article.

The authors concluded that they "can use Mini Nutritional Assessment (MNA) and Nutritional Screening Initiative Checklist (NISC) methods in the elderly, depending on the facilities and preferences to assess and evaluate the nutritional status. "Unfortunately, I could not understand from the article how "facilities" or different study settings could help us to decide using one of the 2 tools. Actually, MNA was designed initially to be used in an institutional setting albeit long-term care.² In addition, MNA was recommended for uncovering the risk of malnutrition, instead of malnutrition in healthy elderly people.³ The authors used it as an assessment tool for elderly malnutrition in a community-based setting. The authors also concluded that NMA "should be considered as the most reliable and valid method." Wondering from which part of their results they could conclude such notion. I also refer to the findings of Azad et al.² who found that when testing the ability of MNA and NISC to distinguish mild or moderate malnutrition with a sensitivity of 56.7%, or severe malnutrition with a sensitivity of 54.4%, are far below the 80% sensitivity needed for a screening tool to be useful.² Moreover, the authors classified their study participants as severe/moderate protein energy malnutrition (PEM) and mild PEM according to their body mass index (BMI). It is my understanding, as

well as other authors, that elderly malnutrition could be at least defined as a BMI of lower than 18.5 kg/m² and serum albumin level of lower than 35 g/l.⁴

Finally, I wish to conclude with these phrases: "For the critics ambiguity represented an annoyance in the cognitive process that was to be eliminated as quickly as the rules of logic would permit. For artists the delay in their resolution was the very focus of their interest."⁵ I wonder what would be the author's preferences!

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Reply from the Author

No reply received from the Author.

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