Letter to the Editor

Regarding the article 'Subjective global assessment of nutritional status in children' by Mahdavi *et al.*

To the Editors,

Mahdavi *et al.* (2010) are to be commended for furthering investigation of the applicability and validity of subjective global assessment (SGA) as a method of nutritional assessment in the paediatric population. Their paper presents a comparison of two different methods of identifying children as malnourished: SGA, a validated method designed for children, and their comparator, a non-validated combination of two or more abnormal objective measurements. To support their use of two abnormal measures as their 'gold standard', Mahdavi *et al.* (2010) referenced an article evaluating nutritional assessment techniques in elderly people aged 65–104 years (Christensson *et al.* 2002). Aside from differences in growth and body composition between these two populations, the cited method used different objective measurements and required a combination of one abnormal anthropometric and one abnormal biochemical measure. This makes the authors' comparison unlikely to be valid. In addition, in order to define a method of nutritional assessment, it is necessary to show that the findings predict outcome. In paediatrics, such outcomes include mortality or morbidity such as infection or poor neurocognitive development. We have previously validated the use of SGA in children (Secker & Jeejeebhoy 2007) and shown its ability to identify children at higher risk of infectious complications and longer hospital stays, and showed that objective parameters used in children did not do so. It

would have strengthened the proposed validity of the authors 'gold standard' technique if it had been shown to have an effect on outcome. It is likely that if the authors had used a validated comparator of objective parameters suitable for children, they too would have found that SGA was superior.

Donna Secker

*Department of Clinical Dietetics
Division of Nephrology
The Hospital for Sick Children
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Khursheed Jeejeebhoy
Division of Gastroenterology
St Michael's Hospital
Institute of Medical Sciences
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario, Canada*

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