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Title: Economy matters to Fight Against Malnutrition: results from a multicenter survey

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Corresponding Author: Prof. Stanislaw Klek, PhD, MD

Corresponding Author's Institution: Stanley Dudrick Memorial Hospital

First Author: Stanislaw Klek, PhD, MD

Order of Authors: Stanislaw Klek, PhD, MD; Michael Chourdakis; Stephan Bischoff; Sergiej Dubrov; Alastair Forbes; Aleksander Galas; Laurence Genton; Haldun Gundogdu; Oivind Irtun; Ilze Jagmane; Triin Jakobson-Forbes; Adam Jirka; Nicholas Kennedy; Andrius Klimasauskas; Igor Khoroshilov; Mauritio Muscaritoli; Miguel Leon-Sanz; Marina Panisic-Sekeljic; Kalliopi Anna Poulia; Stephane Schneider; Ulla Siljamäki-Ojansuu; Mehmet Uyar; Geert Wanten; Zeljko Krznaric

**Abstract: Background and Aim:** Malnutrition represents a serious health care threat, as it increases morbidity, mortality and health care cost. The effective screening and treatment with enteral (EN) or parenteral (PN) nutrition are the key elements of the policy called Optimal Nutrition Care for All (ONCA). The study tried to analyze the impact of the state's economy on the implementation of EN and PN to define its role in ONCA.

**Material and Methods:** an international survey in twenty two European countries was performed between January and December 2014. An electronic questionnaire was distributed to 22 representatives of clinical nutrition (PEN) societies. The questionnaire comprised questions regarding country economy, reimbursement, education and the use EN and PN. Return rate was 90.1% (n=20)

**Results:** EN and PN were used in all countries surveyed (100%), but to different extent. The country's income significantly influenced the reimbursement for EN and PN ( $p < 0.05$ ). It was also associated with the overall use of tube feeding and PN ( $p = 0.05$ ), but not with the use of oral nutritional supplements ( $p = 0.165$ ). The use of both, EN and PN at hospitals was not depended on the economy ( $p > 0.05$ ). Education was actively carried out in all countries, however the teaching at the pre-graduate level was the least widespread, and also correlated with the country income ( $p = 0.042$ ).

**Conclusions:** Results indicated that economic situation influences all aspects of ONCA, including education and treatment. The reimbursement for EN and PN seemed to be the key factor of effective campaign against malnutrition.



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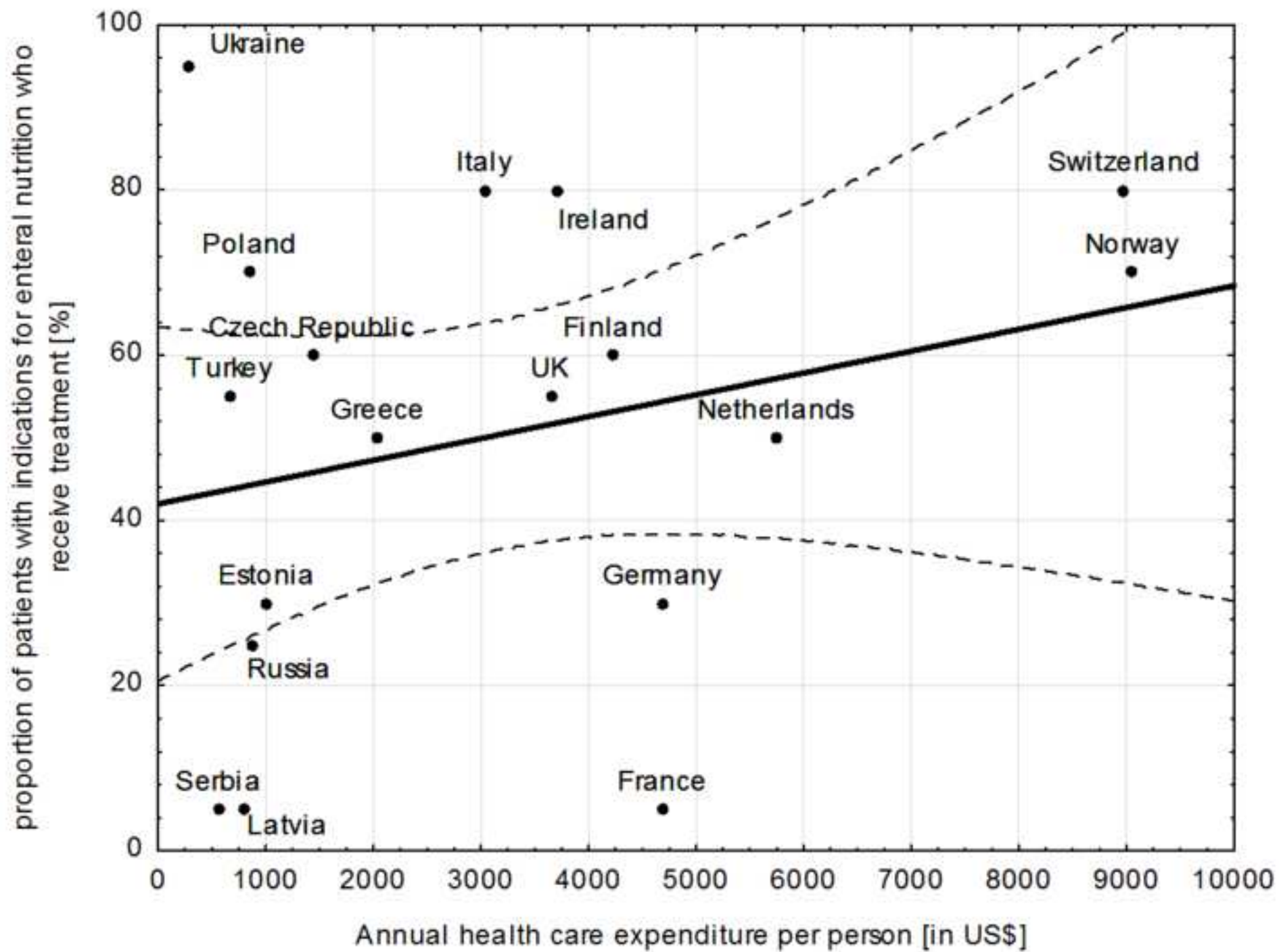
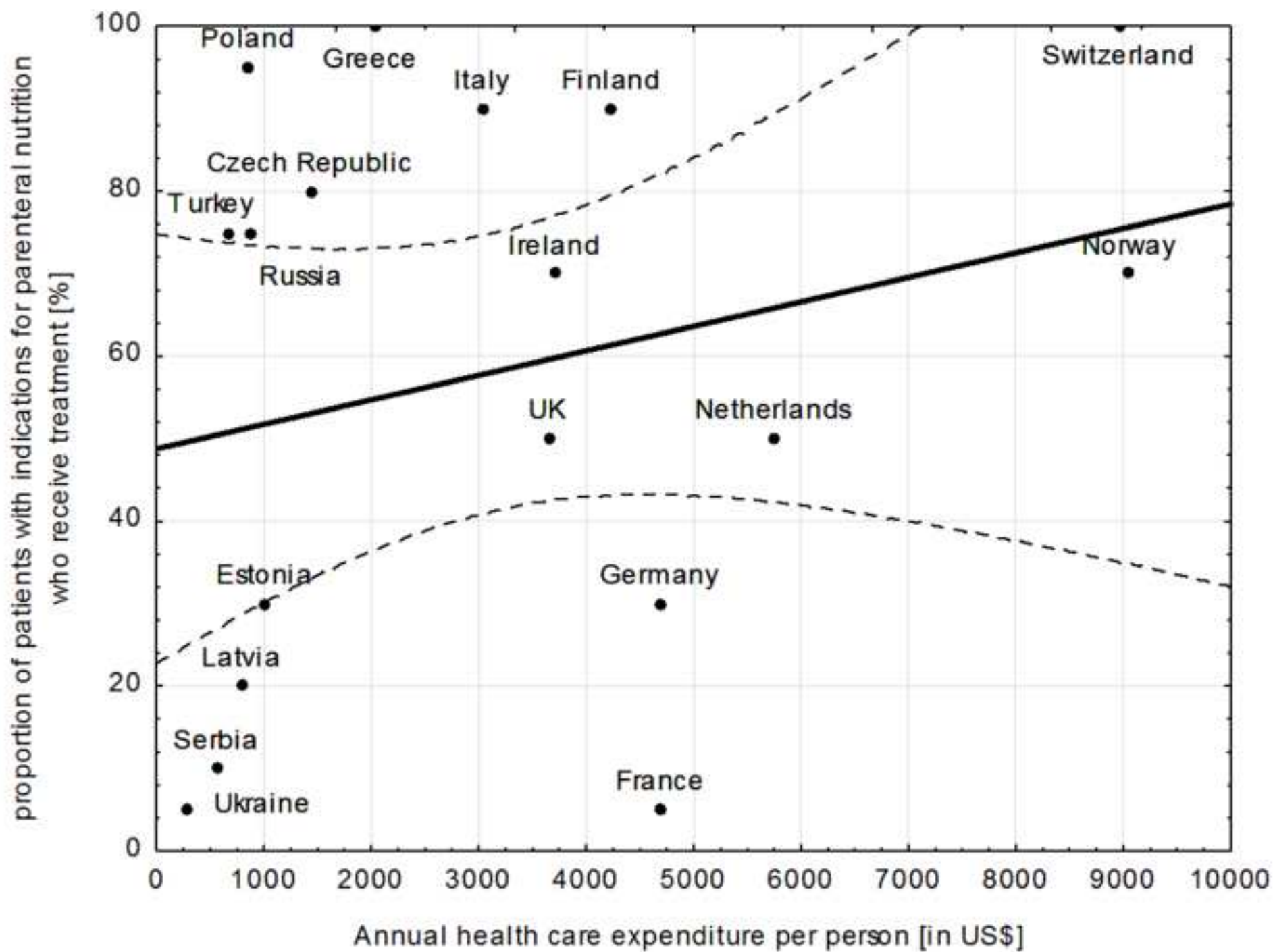


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Stanislaw Klek, MD, PhD  
Stanley Dudrick's Memorial Hospital  
15 Tyniecka Street, 30-050 Skawina, Poland  
[klek@poczta.onet.pl](mailto:klek@poczta.onet.pl)  
ph. +48604293566 fax +48124446846  
(Corresponding author)

24<sup>th</sup> September 2015

**N.E.P. Deutz**  
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Dear Sir,

I am honored to re-submit a manuscript entitled 'Economy matters to Fight Against Malnutrition: results from a multicenter survey' written by the group of international Authors with my kind request to review and to publish in Clinical Nutrition.

The manuscript was again re-written according to Reviewer's remarks. I hope you will find them suitable and you will find our article worth publication.

The file containing answers to Reviewer's comments was attached to the submission.

I hope you will find our manuscript worth interest and publication.

I look forward to your comments and opinion,

Yours faithfully,

Stanislaw Klek

1 **Title:** Economy matters to Fight Against Malnutrition: results from a multicenter survey.

2

3 **Authors:** Stanislaw Klek<sup>1</sup>, Michael Chourdakis<sup>2</sup>, Stephan Bischoff<sup>3</sup>, Sergiej Dubrov<sup>4</sup>,

4 Alastair Forbes<sup>5</sup>, Aleksander Galas<sup>6</sup>, Laurence Genton<sup>7</sup>, Haldun R. Gundogdu<sup>8</sup>, Oivind Irtun<sup>9</sup>,

5 Ilze Jagmane<sup>10</sup>, Triin Jakobson-Forbes<sup>11</sup>, Adam Jirka<sup>12</sup>, Nicholas Kennedy<sup>13</sup>, Andrius

6 Klimasauskas<sup>14</sup>, Igor Khoroshilov<sup>15</sup>, Miguel Leon-Sanz<sup>16</sup>, Maurizio Muscaritoli<sup>17</sup>, Marina

7 Panisic-Sekeljic<sup>18</sup>, Kalliopi Anna Poulia<sup>19</sup>, Stephane Schneider<sup>20</sup>, Ulla Siljamäki-Ojansuu<sup>21</sup>,

8 Mehmet Uyar<sup>22</sup>, Geert Wanten<sup>23</sup>, Zeljko Krznaric<sup>24</sup>

9

10 **Authors' affiliation:**

11 <sup>1</sup>Stanley Dudrick's Memorial Hospital, General Surgery Unit, Skawina, Poland

12 <sup>2</sup>School of Medicine, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

13 <sup>3</sup>Institute of Nutritional Medicine, University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart, Germany

14 <sup>4</sup>National O. Bohomolets Medical University, Department of Anesthesiology and Intensive  
15 Care, Kyiv, Ukraine

16 <sup>5</sup>Norwich Medical School, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

17 <sup>6</sup>Jagiellonian University Medical College, Chair of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine,  
18 Department of Epidemiology, Krakow, Poland

19 <sup>7</sup>Clinical Nutrition, University Hospital, Geneva, Switzerland

20 <sup>8</sup>General Surgery and Gastrointestinal Surgery Atatürk Teaching and Research Hospital,  
21 Ankara, Turkey

22 <sup>9</sup>Gastrosurgery Research Group, UiT The Arctic University of Norway and

23 Division of Surgery, Oncology and Women's Health, University Hospital of North Norway

24 <sup>10</sup>The Riga East Clinical University Hospital, Riga, Latvia

25 <sup>11</sup>Tartu University Hospital, Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care Clinic, Tartu, Estonia

26 <sup>12</sup>Kralovske Vinohrady University Hospital, Internal medicine department, Prague, Czech  
27 Republic

28 <sup>13</sup>Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

29 <sup>14</sup>Vilnius University, Medical faculty, Clinic of Anaesthesiology and reanimatology, Vilnius,  
30 Lithuania

31 <sup>15</sup>North-Western State Medical University named after I.I.Mechnikoff, Saint-Petersburg,  
32 Russian Federation

33 <sup>16</sup>Servicio de Endocrinologia y Nutrition, Hospital Universitatario 12 de Octubre, Madrid,  
34 Spain

35 <sup>17</sup>Department of Clinical Medicine, Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy

36 <sup>18</sup>Medical Academy University Clinic for General Surgery Department for perioperative  
37 nutrition, Belgrade, Serbia

38 <sup>19</sup>Laiko General Hospital, Athens, Greece

39 <sup>20</sup>Gastroenterology and Nutrition, Archet University Hospital, Nice, France

40 <sup>21</sup>Tampere University Hospital, Nutrition Unit, Tampere, Finland

41 <sup>22</sup>Ege University Hospital, Department of Anesthesiology and Intensive Care, Izmir, Turkey

42 <sup>23</sup>Radboud University Medical Center, Nijmegen, Netherlands

43 <sup>24</sup>School of Medicine, University of Zagreb, Croatia

44

45

46 **Address for correspondence and reprints:** Stanislaw Klek MD, PhD, Assoc. Prof.

47 Stanley Dudrick's Memorial Hospital, General Surgery Unit, 32-050 Skawina, 15 Tyniecka  
48 Street, Poland, Phone/Facsimile: (48) 12-444-65-26, e-mail: klek@poczta.onet.pl

49

50 **Key words:** enteral nutrition, parenteral nutrition, disease-related malnutrition,  
51 reimbursement

52

53 **ABSTRACT**

54 **Background and Aim:** Malnutrition represents a serious health care threat, as it increases  
55 morbidity, mortality and health care cost. The effective screening and treatment with enteral  
56 (EN) or parenteral (PN) nutrition are the key elements of the policy called Optimal Nutrition  
57 Care for All (ONCA). The study tried to analyze the impact of the state's economy on the  
58 implementation of EN and PN to define its role in ONCA.

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60 performed between January and December 2014. An electronic questionnaire was distributed  
61 to 22 representatives of clinical nutrition (PEN) societies. The questionnaire comprised  
62 questions regarding country economy, reimbursement, education and the use EN and PN.  
63 Return rate was 90.1% (n=20)

64 **Results:** EN and PN were used in all countries surveyed (100%), but to different extent. The  
65 country's income significantly influenced the reimbursement for EN and PN ( $p < 0.05$ ). It was  
66 also associated with the overall use of tube feeding and PN ( $p = 0.05$ ), but not with the use of  
67 oral nutritional supplements ( $p = 0.165$ ). The use of both, EN and PN at hospitals was not  
68 depended on the economy ( $p > 0.05$ ). Education was actively carried out in all countries,  
69 however the teaching at the pre-graduate level was the least widespread, and also correlated  
70 with the country income ( $p = 0.042$ ).

71 **Conclusions:** Results indicated that economic situation influences all aspects of ONCA,  
72 including education and treatment. The reimbursement for EN and PN seemed to be the key  
73 factor of effective campaign against malnutrition.

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## 78 INTRODUCTION

79 Malnutrition (also: disease-related malnutrition, DRM) is undoubtedly a serious public health  
80 issue worldwide.[1,2] It increases morbidity, mortality, the length of hospital stay, and health-  
81 care costs.[1,2,3] The prevalence of malnutrition differs depending on the patient's  
82 population, country, clinical settings, yet it can be diagnosed in 7-16% of outpatients and in  
83 20-60% patients at admission to hospital.[3-8] The criteria for that diagnostic varied  
84 significantly among authors, but in most of cases the body mass index (BMI) of  $< 18.5 \text{ kg/m}^2$   
85 and unintentional body weight loss  $>10\%$  last 3-6 months, were applied. [3-8] Unfortunately,  
86 the problem of malnutrition is often unnoticed, undiagnosed or untreated, while it generates  
87 more costs than overnutrition or obesity, according to British Society for Enteral and  
88 Parenteral Nutrition (BAPEN).[9]

89 The European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN) recognized DRM as a  
90 grave problem more than thirty years ago. Since then, the society has undertaken many  
91 actions to change this situation. At the beginning, those activities were called the Fight  
92 Against Malnutrition (FAM).[1] In 2014 FAM became a part of a campaign called Optimal  
93 Nutrition Care for All (ONCA).[10] ONCA's aim is to facilitate screening for risk of disease-  
94 related malnutrition/undernutrition and nutritional care implementation across Europe.[10]  
95 ONCA includes, among others, the worldwide 'NutritionDay' survey, many local and  
96 international events (including ONCA conferences in Brussels, Prague, Vienna, Warsaw and  
97 Zagreb), scientific and research grants, scientific and educational symposia, workshops and  
98 trainings. This activity is administered by European Nutrition for Health Alliance (ENHS), an  
99 association of stakeholders, in which ESPEN is the strategic partner. Therefore, it is possible

100 to perform all actions in a close cooperation with national scientific societies for enteral and  
101 parenteral nutrition (or clinical nutrition) societies, so-called 'PEN' societies. Those activities  
102 increased awareness, improved screening, amplified the use of enteral (EN) and parenteral  
103 nutrition (PN), representing two types of clinical nutrition support (CN), hence, improved the  
104 situation. Results differed, however, among countries. The question what are the key elements  
105 of efficient ONCA emerged and remained unanswered. Therefore, the purpose of the study  
106 was to answer that query by assessing the situation in European countries. Following aspects  
107 were analyzed: the presence of the reimbursement for each type of clinical nutrition (CN); the  
108 level of education for CN and the real use of EN and PN in various short- and long term  
109 settings.

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**METHODS**

An European survey was performed using an electronic questionnaire [Table 1]. The whole project was accomplished within 12 months, between January and December 2014, due to questionnaires distribution, local surveys and further data collecting. The questionnaire was circulated to representatives of twenty-two PEN societies. Participants were supposed to answer all questions, including the prevalence of malnutrition, using recent, already collected, data or new survey performed for the purpose of the study. The diagnostic criteria for malnutrition were (either of the following):

- body mass index (BMI) of  $< 18.5 \text{ kg/m}^2$
- and unintentional body weight loss  $>10\%$  last 3-6 months.

For the purpose of financial analysis, all participating countries were categorized by their economic status according to the World Bank criteria for national income [9], and by tertiles of the average health care expenditure per head for 2012 [9].

On the basis of the national income, three categories were selected:

- a. lower middle income countries: Ukraine
- b. upper middle income countries: Serbia, Turkey
- c. high income: Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, UK

On the basis of annual healthcare expenditure, three tertiles were named:

- 150 a. 1st tertile (293 - 908 US Dollars/per person): Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Serbia,  
151 Turkey, Ukraine
- 152 b. 2nd tertile (1010-3708 USD/per person): Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Ireland,  
153 Italy, Spain, UK
- 154 c. 3rd tertile (4232-9055 USD/per person): Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands,  
155 Norway, Switzerland

156 The following parameters were analyzed for each participating country:

- 157 - prevalence of malnutrition
- 158 - institution responsible for health care regulations
- 159 - presence and type of insurance company (public/ private/ both)
- 160 - use of EN and PN at various settings (hospitals, home, chronic care facilities)
- 161 - presence of the reimbursement for EN and PN
- 162 - presence and type of education in the field of CN

163 The term ‘hospital settings’ referred to all in-patients, ‘home’ to all out-patients staying at  
164 home along/ with family/ other care-givers, but without any additional chronic care provided  
165 at his/her household level, chronic care and palliative care centers referred to all patients  
166 staying outside home, at long term care facilities, due to untreatable cancer (the latter) or any  
167 chronic condition, other than cancer (the first).

168

#### 169 Statistical Analysis

170 The statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS v.19 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL) software  
171 package. Because in every analysis the expected frequency was less than 5 in more than 20%  
172 of cells, the Fisher test was used for the analyses of categorical variables. The prevalence of  
173 malnutrition, and the proportion of patients with indicators for EN or PN who receive  
174 treatment were considered as continuous variables. As the sample size was relatively small,

175 the normal distribution was not tested due to low power to reject a null hypothesis (assuming  
176 equivalence to normal distribution). Consequently, the U-Mann-Whitney test for two-group  
177 and the Kruskal-Wallis test for three-group comparisons were used. To show more detailed  
178 descriptive information, means, standard deviation, medians, interquartile range, minimal and  
179 maximal values were provided. A p-value <0.05 was accepted as being statistically  
180 significant.

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## 182 RESULTS

183 Twenty answered questionnaires were returned (the response rate was 90.1%), and analyzed.  
184 Insurance companies operated as health care financiers in all twenty participating countries  
185 (100%). There were only private institutions in Serbia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom  
186 (UK), while in Croatia, France and Poland health care expenses were covered by the state-  
187 funded and state-governed entity. In the other fourteen countries both private and state  
188 insurance companies were present.

189 The Ministry of Health (or its local equivalent) was the institution responsible for forming  
190 health policy in all countries (100%). Additionally, Interterritorial Council and Regional  
191 Governments contributed to that process in Spain, while the insurance companies participated  
192 in the process in Croatia, Finland, Ireland and Poland. In Estonia the opinion of medical  
193 societies was always formally taken into account, while in Norway the direct input of the  
194 National Assembly was important.

195 Enteral (EN) and parenteral nutrition (PN) were used in all European countries (100%), but to  
196 different extend. This relation was clear as far as the place of care was considered (hospital,  
197 home, long term facility). EN and PN were available to all patients in all countries at the  
198 hospital settings. EN and PN were not used on a regular basis in chronic care facilities in  
199 Croatia, Latvia and Ukraine, at home in Latvia and Russia, nor at palliative cancer care

200 centers in Croatia, Latvia, Russia and Serbia. The UK's situation regarding palliative care  
201 nutrition is much more complicated as intravenous infusions are often not permitted in  
202 palliative care homes, although the use of PN for cancer-related intestinal failure has been one  
203 of the most quickly growing patient groups.

204 A general overview shows that the use of EN and PN in European countries fails to correlate  
205 closely with the income of the country, as presented in Table 2. The level of *per capita*  
206 healthcare expenditure and use of clinical nutrition were not correlated, for all countries there  
207 was no statistically significant difference ( $p>0.05$ )

208 The use of clinical nutrition in chronic care centers, in palliative centers, and at home, seemed  
209 to be associated with the country's overall income, but those associations were not  
210 statistically significant ( $p=0.302$ ,  $p=0.302$  and  $p=0.088$ , respectively).

211 Analysis based on the influence of health care expenditure per capita showed no statistical  
212 differences as far as the use of EN ( $p=1.000$ ) was concerned, but significant differences for  
213 PN. The latter was observed to be of a higher prevalence at home and chronic care facilities in  
214 countries from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tertiles ( $p=0.018$ ).

215 The level of the country's income was associated with reimbursement for EN and PN, as  
216 presented in Table 3. The reimbursement was crucial as far as the use of tube feeding and  
217 intravenous nutrition were considered ( $p=0.05$ ), but did not matter in the case of oral  
218 nutritional supplements ( $p=0.165$ , Table 4). Similar observations were made for the  
219 differences in use of PN in chronic settings and in the patient's home ( $p=0.001$  and  $p=0.014$ ,  
220 respectively)

221 If EN and/or PN was not reimbursed, all costs were covered by patient or his/her family.

222 The prevalence of malnutrition, as identified by our respondents, is significantly and  
223 negatively associated with national income ( $p=0.038$ ). The data for the prevalence were  
224 collected by representatives of local PEN societies.

225 The greater use of CN across categories of income level was also associated with a lower  
226 proportion of patients with indications for EN and PN, but the numbers here are small and the  
227 results are not statistically significant (Table 5). The reimbursement proved to be a strong  
228 predictor for the use of enteral tube feeding, and for all types of CN, in chronic care facilities  
229 ( $p=0.001$  for both), as well as for the use of parenteral nutrition, and all types of CN, at home  
230 ( $p=0.014$  for both) (Table 7).

231 The proportion of patients with indications for CN to those who actually received treatment  
232 was also calculated. Our analyses confirm positive links for both EN and PN, but there are  
233 countries (Ukraine for EN, Poland for EN and PN, Czech Republic for EN and PN, and  
234 Greece for PN) with relatively low amounts of money but high proportions of treated patients,  
235 and, on the other hand, countries (France and Germany, both for EN and PN) with more  
236 money available but lower proportions of treated patients (Figure 1 and Figure 2)

237 Local PEN societies representative collected the data on education. Trainings for clinical  
238 nutrition was present in all twenty countries participating in the study (100%). Most  
239 frequently these activities were organized by national PEN societies as local trainings (17  
240 countries [85%]), quite common were also postgraduate trainings and ESPEN LLL programs  
241 (16 [80%] and 12 [60%] countries respectively). Investigation of the relationship between  
242 different types of medical training and the average per capita healthcare expenditure showed  
243 little linkage with postgraduate, ESPEN LLL or local PEN society training. The prevalence of  
244 undergraduate training was clearly related to the country's health care expenditure showing a  
245 significant increase across categories of financial commitment ( $p=0.042$ ) (Table 6).

246 No relation between the number of educational activities and the factual use of CN was  
247 observed. ( $p>0.05$ )

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## DISCUSSION

Malnutrition represent a serious health care thread as it increases morbidity, mortality and health care cost for all age groups. [1,2] A new Croatian study showed that the total cost of adult malnutrition for selected diagnoses was €97.35 million per year, accounting for 3.38% of the total Croatian national health care budget, and the average cost per patient was estimated at €1640.48. [12] The largest share was used for medications (43%), followed by 34% for hospitalization, 13% for community health nursing, while PN and EN costs contributed with 6% and 1% respectively.[12] Malnutrition is widespread - recent European survey showed that 57.4% of Estonian, 39.4% of Turkish, 32.8% Greek, 21.9% Polish and 14.2% of Lithuanian patients were diagnosed with malnutrition [13] Moreover, severe malnutrition was reported in 19.7% of Turkish patients, and in 9.9% of Polish and Greek individuals (9.4%).[13]

Therefore, actions like FAM, are of the utmost importance. The implementation of EN and PN, which are, along with screening, key elements for the efficient FAM, vary among countries. The same study showed that they could be influenced by the political situation, economy as well as the activity of the national PEN societies in term of raising the awareness, education, cooperation with funding and policy-making authorities. The latter seemed to be affected by the economy as well.



274 The factual associations among education, economy, reimbursement and the utilization of EN  
275 and PN have, however, never been thoroughly analyzed. Therefore, the following study was  
276 supposed to address those ambiguities.

277 Some of results were really encouraging: both EN and PN are used in all of the European  
278 countries surveyed, apparently independently of the income of the country. They are,  
279 however, mostly available to patients at hospital settings, and often unavailable to those at  
280 chronic care facilities or at home. National income did not appear to influence that situation  
281 directly, but greatly influenced reimbursement both for EN and PN, which seem to have  
282 important effects on their utilization. Oral nutritional supplements (ONS) were the only  
283 treatment method to prove otherwise. Education for clinical nutrition was present in all  
284 participating countries (100%). Those included, however, mostly postgraduate activities, often  
285 held by the national PEN or ESPEN, not by the local institutions. Pregraduate education was  
286 much less frequent, and that fact was inversely related to country income. The level of  
287 education did not influence the administration of neither EN nor PN.

288 To our knowledge this is the first survey on the educational and economic aspects of the fight  
289 against malnutrition. Authors are aware of the limitations of the study, particularly the  
290 dependence on local PEN's representatives regarding the provision of data. It is important,  
291 however, to emphasize that there is no other method of collecting such circuitous data.  
292 Undoubtedly, the study offered a lot of new data, which provided a new insight into the  
293 treatment of malnutrition.

294 Results indicated unequivocally that economic situation influences all aspects of actions  
295 against malnutrition, including education and treatment. The reimbursement for EN and PN  
296 seemed also to be of a vital role for those activities.

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307 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

308 The authors hereby declare that the article is original, is not under consideration for  
309 publication anywhere else and has not been previously published. Authors declare no  
310 potential or actual personal, political or financial interest in the material, information or  
311 techniques described in the paper.

312

313 STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

314 SK coordinated the research, he was responsible for critical data analysis, evaluation of the  
315 outcome, and writing of the manuscript. AG was responsible for the statistics and data  
316 analysis. All authors have made substantial contributions to the data collection and drafting of  
317 the manuscript, for which they take collective responsibility.

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1 **Title:** Economy matters to Fight Against Malnutrition: results from a multicenter survey.

2

3 **Authors:** Stanislaw Klek<sup>1</sup>, Michael Chourdakis<sup>2</sup>, Stephan Bischoff<sup>3</sup>, Sergiej Dubrov<sup>4</sup>,

4 Alastair Forbes<sup>5</sup>, Aleksander Galas<sup>6</sup>, Laurence Genton<sup>7</sup>, Haldun R. Gundogdu<sup>8</sup>, Oivind Irtun<sup>9</sup>,

5 Ilze Jagmane<sup>10</sup>, Triin Jakobson-Forbes<sup>11</sup>, Adam Jirka<sup>12</sup>, Nicholas Kennedy<sup>13</sup>, Andrius

6 Klimasauskas<sup>14</sup>, Igor Khoroshilov<sup>15</sup>, Miguel Leon-Sanz<sup>16</sup>, Maurizio Muscaritoli<sup>17</sup>, Marina

7 Panisic-Sekeljic<sup>18</sup>, Kalliopi Anna Poulia<sup>19</sup>, Stephane Schneider<sup>20</sup>, Ulla Siljamäki-Ojansuu<sup>21</sup>,

8 Mehmet Uyar<sup>22</sup>, Geert Wanten<sup>23</sup>, Zeljko Krznaric<sup>24</sup>

9

10 **Authors' affiliation:**

11 <sup>1</sup>Stanley Dudrick's Memorial Hospital, General Surgery Unit, Skawina, Poland

12 <sup>2</sup>School of Medicine, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

13 <sup>3</sup>Institute of Nutritional Medicine, University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart, Germany

14 <sup>4</sup>National O. Bohomolets Medical University, Department of Anesthesiology and Intensive  
15 Care, Kyiv, Ukraine

16 <sup>5</sup>Norwich Medical School, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK

17 <sup>6</sup>Jagiellonian University Medical College, Chair of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine,  
18 Department of Epidemiology, Krakow, Poland

19 <sup>7</sup>Clinical Nutrition, University Hospital, Geneva, Switzerland

20 <sup>8</sup>General Surgery and Gastrointestinal Surgery Atatürk Teaching and Research Hospital,  
21 Ankara, Turkey

22 <sup>9</sup>Gastrosurgery Research Group, UiT The Arctic University of Norway and

23 Division of Surgery, Oncology and Women's Health, University Hospital of North Norway

24 <sup>10</sup>The Riga East Clinical University Hospital, Riga, Latvia

25 <sup>11</sup>Tartu University Hospital, Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care Clinic, Tartu, Estonia

26 <sup>12</sup>Kralovske Vinohrady University Hospital, Internal medicine department, Prague, Czech  
27 Republic

28 <sup>13</sup>Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

29 <sup>14</sup>Vilnius University, Medical faculty, Clinic of Anaesthesiology and reanimatology, Vilnius,  
30 Lithuania

31 <sup>15</sup>North-Western State Medical University named after I.I.Mechnikoff, Saint-Petersburg,  
32 Russian Federation

33 <sup>16</sup>Servicio de Endocrinologia y Nutrition, Hospital Universitatario 12 de Octubre, Madrid,  
34 Spain

35 <sup>17</sup>Department of Clinical Medicine, Sapienza, University of Rome, Italy

36 <sup>18</sup>Medical Academy University Clinic for General Surgery Department for perioperative  
37 nutrition, Belgrade, Serbia

38 <sup>19</sup>Laiko General Hospital, Athens, Greece

39 <sup>20</sup>Gastroenterology and Nutrition, Archet University Hospital, Nice, France

40 <sup>21</sup>Tampere University Hospital, Nutrition Unit, Tampere, Finland

41 <sup>22</sup>Ege University Hospital, Department of Anesthesiology and Intensive Care, Izmir, Turkey

42 <sup>23</sup>Radboud University Medical Center, Nijmegen, Netherlands

43 <sup>24</sup>School of Medicine, University of Zagreb, Croatia

44

45

46 **Address for correspondence and reprints:** Stanislaw Klek MD, PhD, Assoc. Prof.

47 Stanley Dudrick's Memorial Hospital, General Surgery Unit, 32-050 Skawina, 15 Tyniecka  
48 Street, Poland, Phone/Facsimile: (48) 12-444-65-26, e-mail: klek@poczta.onet.pl

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50 **Key words:** enteral nutrition, parenteral nutrition, disease-related malnutrition,  
51 reimbursement

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53 **ABSTRACT**

54 **Background and Aim:** Malnutrition represents a serious health care threat, as it increases  
55 morbidity, mortality and health care cost. The effective screening and treatment with enteral  
56 (EN) or parenteral (PN) nutrition are the key elements of the policy called Optimal Nutrition  
57 Care for All (ONCA). The study tried to analyze the impact of the state's economy on the  
58 implementation of EN and PN to define its role in ONCA.

59 **Material and Methods:** an international survey in twenty two European countries was  
60 performed between January and December 2014. An electronic questionnaire was distributed  
61 to 22 representatives of clinical nutrition (PEN) societies. The questionnaire comprised  
62 questions regarding country economy, reimbursement, education and the use EN and PN.  
63 Return rate was 90.1% (n=20)

64 **Results:** EN and PN were used in all countries surveyed (100%), but to different extent. The  
65 country's income significantly influenced the reimbursement for EN and PN ( $p < 0.05$ ). It was  
66 also associated with the overall use of tube feeding and PN ( $p = 0.05$ ), but not with the use of  
67 oral nutritional supplements ( $p = 0.165$ ). The use of both, EN and PN at hospitals was not  
68 depended on the economy ( $p > 0.05$ ). Education was actively carried out in all countries,  
69 however the teaching at the pre-graduate level was the least widespread, and also correlated  
70 with the country income ( $p = 0.042$ ).

71 **Conclusions:** Results indicated that economic situation influences all aspects of ONCA,  
72 including education and treatment. The reimbursement for EN and PN seemed to be the key  
73 factor of effective campaign against malnutrition.

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## 78 INTRODUCTION

79 Malnutrition (also: disease-related malnutrition, DRM) is undoubtedly a serious public health  
80 issue worldwide.[1,2] It increases morbidity, mortality, the length of hospital stay, and health-  
81 care costs.[1,2,3] The prevalence of malnutrition differs depending on the patient's  
82 population, country, clinical settings, yet it can be diagnosed in 7-16% of outpatients and in  
83 20-60% patients at admission to hospital.[3-8] The criteria for that diagnostic varied  
84 significantly among authors, but in most of cases the body mass index (BMI) of  $< 18.5 \text{ kg/m}^2$   
85 and unintentional body weight loss  $>10\%$  last 3-6 months, were applied. [3-8] Unfortunately,  
86 the problem of malnutrition is often unnoticed, undiagnosed or untreated, while it generates  
87 more costs than overnutrition or obesity, according to British Society for Enteral and  
88 Parenteral Nutrition (BAPEN).[9]

89 The European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN) recognized DRM as a  
90 grave problem more than thirty years ago. Since then, the society has undertaken many  
91 actions to change this situation. At the beginning, those activities were called the Fight  
92 Against Malnutrition (FAM).[1] In 2014 FAM became a part of a campaign called Optimal  
93 Nutrition Care for All (ONCA).[10] ONCA's aim is to facilitate screening for risk of disease-  
94 related malnutrition/undernutrition and nutritional care implementation across Europe.[10]  
95 ONCA includes, among others, the worldwide 'NutritionDay' survey, many local and  
96 international events (including ONCA conferences in Brussels, Prague, Vienna, Warsaw and  
97 Zagreb), scientific and research grants, scientific and educational symposia, workshops and  
98 trainings. This activity is administered by European Nutrition for Health Alliance (ENHS), an  
99 association of stakeholders, in which ESPEN is the strategic partner. Therefore, it is possible

100 to perform all actions in a close cooperation with national scientific societies for enteral and  
101 parenteral nutrition (or clinical nutrition) societies, so-called 'PEN' societies. Those activities  
102 increased awareness, improved screening, amplified the use of enteral (EN) and parenteral  
103 nutrition (PN), representing two types of clinical nutrition support (CN), hence, improved the  
104 situation. Results differed, however, among countries. The question what are the key elements  
105 of efficient ONCA emerged and remained unanswered. Therefore, the purpose of the study  
106 was to answer that query by assessing the situation in European countries. Following aspects  
107 were analyzed: the presence of the reimbursement for each type of clinical nutrition (CN); the  
108 level of education for CN and the real use of EN and PN in various short- and long term  
109 settings.

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**METHODS**

An European survey was performed using an electronic questionnaire [Table 1]. The whole project was accomplished within 12 months, between January and December 2014, due to questionnaires distribution, local surveys and further data collecting. The questionnaire was circulated to representatives of twenty-two PEN societies. Participants were supposed to answer all questions, including the prevalence of malnutrition, using recent, already collected, data or new survey performed for the purpose of the study. The diagnostic criteria for malnutrition were (either of the following):

- body mass index (BMI) of  $< 18.5 \text{ kg/m}^2$
- and unintentional body weight loss  $>10\%$  last 3-6 months.

For the purpose of financial analysis, all participating countries were categorized by their economic status according to the World Bank criteria for national income [9], and by tertiles of the average health care expenditure per head for 2012 [9].

On the basis of the national income, three categories were selected:

- a. lower middle income countries: Ukraine
- b. upper middle income countries: Serbia, Turkey
- c. high income: Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, UK

On the basis of annual healthcare expenditure, three tertiles were named:

- 150 a. 1st tertile (293 - 908 US Dollars/per person): Croatia, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Serbia,  
151 Turkey, Ukraine
- 152 b. 2nd tertile (1010-3708 USD/per person): Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Ireland,  
153 Italy, Spain, UK
- 154 c. 3rd tertile (4232-9055 USD/per person): Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands,  
155 Norway, Switzerland

156 The following parameters were analyzed for each participating country:

- 157 - prevalence of malnutrition
- 158 - institution responsible for health care regulations
- 159 - presence and type of insurance company (public/ private/ both)
- 160 - use of EN and PN at various settings (hospitals, home, chronic care facilities)
- 161 - presence of the reimbursement for EN and PN
- 162 - presence and type of education in the field of CN

163 The term ‘hospital settings’ referred to all in-patients, ‘home’ to all out-patients staying at  
164 home along/ with family/ other care-givers, but without any additional chronic care provided  
165 at his/her household level, chronic care and palliative care centers referred to all patients  
166 staying outside home, at long term care facilities, due to untreatable cancer (the latter) or any  
167 chronic condition, other than cancer (the first).

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#### 169 Statistical Analysis

170 The statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS v.19 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL) software  
171 package. Because in every analysis the expected frequency was less than 5 in more than 20%  
172 of cells, the Fisher test was used for the analyses of categorical variables. The prevalence of  
173 malnutrition, and the proportion of patients with indicators for EN or PN who receive  
174 treatment were considered as continuous variables. As the sample size was relatively small,

175 the normal distribution was not tested due to low power to reject a null hypothesis (assuming  
176 equivalence to normal distribution). Consequently, the U-Mann-Whitney test for two-group  
177 and the Kruskal-Wallis test for three-group comparisons were used. To show more detailed  
178 descriptive information, means, standard deviation, medians, interquartile range, minimal and  
179 maximal values were provided. A p-value <0.05 was accepted as being statistically  
180 significant.

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## 182 RESULTS

183 Twenty answered questionnaires were returned (the response rate was 90.1%), and analyzed.  
184 Insurance companies operated as health care financiers in all twenty participating countries  
185 (100%). There were only private institutions in Serbia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom  
186 (UK), while in Croatia, France and Poland health care expenses were covered by the state-  
187 funded and state-governed entity. In the other fourteen countries both private and state  
188 insurance companies were present.

189 The Ministry of Health (or its local equivalent) was the institution responsible for forming  
190 health policy in all countries (100%). Additionally, Interterritorial Council and Regional  
191 Governments contributed to that process in Spain, while the insurance companies participated  
192 in the process in Croatia, Finland, Ireland and Poland. In Estonia the opinion of medical  
193 societies was always formally taken into account, while in Norway the direct input of the  
194 National Assembly was important.

195 Enteral (EN) and parenteral nutrition (PN) were used in all European countries (100%), but to  
196 different extend. This relation was clear as far as the place of care was considered (hospital,  
197 home, long term facility). EN and PN were available to all patients in all countries at the  
198 hospital settings. EN and PN were not used on a regular basis in chronic care facilities in  
199 Croatia, Latvia and Ukraine, at home in Latvia and Russia, nor at palliative cancer care

200 centers in Croatia, Latvia, Russia and Serbia. The UK's situation regarding palliative care  
201 nutrition is much more complicated as intravenous infusions are often not permitted in  
202 palliative care homes, although the use of PN for cancer-related intestinal failure has been one  
203 of the most quickly growing patient groups.

204 A general overview shows that the use of EN and PN in European countries fails to correlate  
205 closely with the income of the country, as presented in Table 2. The level of *per capita*  
206 healthcare expenditure and use of clinical nutrition were not correlated, for all countries there  
207 was no statistically significant difference ( $p>0.05$ )

208 The use of clinical nutrition in chronic care centers, in palliative centers, and at home, seemed  
209 to be associated with the country's overall income, but those associations were not  
210 statistically significant ( $p=0.302$ ,  $p=0.302$  and  $p=0.088$ , respectively).

211 Analysis based on the influence of health care expenditure per capita showed no statistical  
212 differences as far as the use of EN ( $p=1.000$ ) was concerned, but significant differences for  
213 PN. The latter was observed to be of a higher prevalence at home and chronic care facilities in  
214 countries from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> tertiles ( $p=0.018$ ).

215 The level of the country's income was associated with reimbursement for EN and PN, as  
216 presented in Table 3. The reimbursement was crucial as far as the use of tube feeding and  
217 intravenous nutrition were considered ( $p=0.05$ ), but did not matter in the case of oral  
218 nutritional supplements ( $p=0.165$ , Table 4). Similar observations were made for the  
219 differences in use of PN in chronic settings and in the patient's home ( $p=0.001$  and  $p=0.014$ ,  
220 respectively)

221 If EN and/or PN was not reimbursed, all costs were covered by patient or his/her family.

222 The prevalence of malnutrition, as identified by our respondents, is significantly and  
223 negatively associated with national income ( $p=0.038$ ). The data for the prevalence were  
224 collected by representatives of local PEN societies.

225 The greater use of CN across categories of income level was also associated with a lower  
226 proportion of patients with indications for EN and PN, but the numbers here are small and the  
227 results are not statistically significant (Table 5). The reimbursement proved to be a strong  
228 predictor for the use of enteral tube feeding, and for all types of CN, in chronic care facilities  
229 ( $p=0.001$  for both), as well as for the use of parenteral nutrition, and all types of CN, at home  
230 ( $p=0.014$  for both) (Table 7).

231 The proportion of patients with indications for CN to those who actually received treatment  
232 was also calculated. Our analyses confirm positive links for both EN and PN, but there are  
233 countries (Ukraine for EN, Poland for EN and PN, Czech Republic for EN and PN, and  
234 Greece for PN) with relatively low amounts of money but high proportions of treated patients,  
235 and, on the other hand, countries (France and Germany, both for EN and PN) with more  
236 money available but lower proportions of treated patients (Figure 1 and Figure 2)

237 Local PEN societies representative collected the data on education. Trainings for clinical  
238 nutrition was present in all twenty countries participating in the study (100%). Most  
239 frequently these activities were organized by national PEN societies as local trainings (17  
240 countries [85%]), quite common were also postgraduate trainings and ESPEN LLL programs  
241 (16 [80%] and 12 [60%] countries respectively). Investigation of the relationship between  
242 different types of medical training and the average per capita healthcare expenditure showed  
243 little linkage with postgraduate, ESPEN LLL or local PEN society training. The prevalence of  
244 undergraduate training was clearly related to the country's health care expenditure showing a  
245 significant increase across categories of financial commitment ( $p=0.042$ ) (Table 6).

246 No relation between the number of educational activities and the factual use of CN was  
247 observed. ( $p>0.05$ )

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## DISCUSSION

Malnutrition represent a serious health care thread as it increases morbidity, mortality and health care cost for all age groups. [1,2] A new Croatian study showed that the total cost of adult malnutrition for selected diagnoses was €97.35 million per year, accounting for 3.38% of the total Croatian national health care budget, and the average cost per patient was estimated at €1640.48. [12] The largest share was used for medications (43%), followed by 34% for hospitalization, 13% for community health nursing, while PN and EN costs contributed with 6% and 1% respectively.[12] Malnutrition is widespread - recent European survey showed that 57.4% of Estonian, 39.4% of Turkish, 32.8% Greek, 21.9% Polish and 14.2% of Lithuanian patients were diagnosed with malnutrition [13] Moreover, severe malnutrition was reported in 19.7% of Turkish patients, and in 9.9% of Polish and Greek individuals (9.4%).[13]

Therefore, actions like FAM, are of the utmost importance. The implementation of EN and PN, which are, along with screening, key elements for the efficient FAM, vary among countries. The same study showed that they could be influenced by the political situation, economy as well as the activity of the national PEN societies in term of raising the awareness, education, cooperation with funding and policy-making authorities. The latter seemed to be affected by the economy as well.



274 The factual associations among education, economy, reimbursement and the utilization of EN  
275 and PN have, however, never been thoroughly analyzed. Therefore, the following study was  
276 supposed to address those ambiguities.

277 Some of results were really encouraging: both EN and PN are used in all of the European  
278 countries surveyed, apparently independently of the income of the country. They are,  
279 however, mostly available to patients at hospital settings, and often unavailable to those at  
280 chronic care facilities or at home. National income did not appear to influence that situation  
281 directly, but greatly influenced reimbursement both for EN and PN, which seem to have  
282 important effects on their utilization. Oral nutritional supplements (ONS) were the only  
283 treatment method to prove otherwise. Education for clinical nutrition was present in all  
284 participating countries (100%). Those included, however, mostly postgraduate activities, often  
285 held by the national PEN or ESPEN, not by the local institutions. Pregraduate education was  
286 much less frequent, and that fact was inversely related to country income. The level of  
287 education did not influence the administration of neither EN nor PN.

288 To our knowledge this is the first survey on the educational and economic aspects of the fight  
289 against malnutrition. Authors are aware of the limitations of the study, particularly the  
290 dependence on local PEN's representatives regarding the provision of data. It is important,  
291 however, to emphasize that there is no other method of collecting such circuitous data.  
292 Undoubtedly, the study offered a lot of new data, which provided a new insight into the  
293 treatment of malnutrition.

294 Results indicated unequivocally that economic situation influences all aspects of actions  
295 against malnutrition, including education and treatment. The reimbursement for EN and PN  
296 seemed also to be of a vital role for those activities.

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307 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

308 The authors hereby declare that the article is original, is not under consideration for  
309 publication anywhere else and has not been previously published. Authors declare no  
310 potential or actual personal, political or financial interest in the material, information or  
311 techniques described in the paper.

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313 STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

314 SK coordinated the research, he was responsible for critical data analysis, evaluation of the  
315 outcome, and writing of the manuscript. AG was responsible for the statistics and data  
316 analysis. All authors have made substantial contributions to the data collection and drafting of  
317 the manuscript, for which they take collective responsibility.

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ANSWERS TO EDITOR AND REVIEWER'S COMMENTS

MS. Ref. No.: YCLNU-D-15-00488

Title: "Economy matters to Fight Against Malnutrition: results from a multicenter survey"

Comment:

For this article the authors did some changes which are acceptable.

However in the Introduction it is imperative to mention that ONCA is an action driven by ENHA -an association of stakeholders in which ESPEN is a Key player

Answer: The text was changed – see below.

‘In 2014 FAM became a part of a campaign called Optimal Nutrition Care for All (ONCA).[10] ONCA’s aim is to facilitate greater screening for risk of disease-related malnutrition/undernutrition and nutritional care implementation across Europe.[10] It includes, among others, the worldwide ‘NutritionDay’ survey, many local and international events (including ONCA conferences in Brussels, Prague, Vienna, Warsaw and Zagreb), scientific and research grants, scientific and educational symposia, workshops and trainings. This activity is govern by European Nutrition for Health Alliance (ENHS), an association of stakeholders, in which ESPEN is the key player. Therefore, actions could be performed in a close cooperation with national scientific societies for enteral and parenteral nutrition (or clinical nutrition) societies, so-called ‘PEN’ societies.’