Abstract:

The EQ5D, formerly the EuroQol, is the most widely used multi-attribute utility instrument in the world. Additionally, it is the most commonly used utility measure in Australia: by October 2007 there were 47 Australian papers published which reported use of the EQ5D. Universally, these papers used the UK tariffs for weighting the EQ5D descriptive system to calculate utility values. The implicit assumption is that UK values are those most appropriate for Australians. As yet, however, there is no empirical research supporting this position. Research in Europe has resulted in several European countries developing their own tariff weights which differ from those of the UK. It seems that tariff weights for the EQ5D may be culturally specific.

Recently, US weights have been developed and published. Because these differ quite substantially from those developed in the UK, it has been recommended that US studies should use US weights. This paper reports a study examining the effect of using both US and UK weights to score the EQ5D in two cross-sectional Australian samples. The first dataset comprised 972 participants, stratified by inpatient, outpatient and a general community sample, and the second dataset was a community population sample of 3015 participants.

The results show that there are major differences in assigned utility scores depending upon which of the UK or US tariff weights are used. The differences in utility scores are minor for those participants in good health, but increasingly differ as health becomes poorer. For those in poor health, there is almost no agreement between the UK and the US tariffs, in part because of the use of the 'N3' term in the UK tariff – a term which is handled quite differently in the US tariff. There are far-reaching implications for researchers using the EQ5D; particularly those conducting cost-utility analysis studies where the consequent QALYs are based on gains in EQ5D utility scores. It is concluded that there is an urgent need to research which of the UK or US tariffs are more appropriate for Australian use, and, if needed, for a set of Australian weights to be developed.