Rationale: Hospital malnutrition is a global health problem affecting 30-50% of hospitalized patients. There are no estimates of the size of this problem in Ecuadorian hospitals. Hospital malnutrition might influence the quality of medical assistance provided to hospitalized populations. Objectives: To estimate the current frequency of malnutrition among patients admitted to Ecuadorian public hospitals. Materials and methods: The Ecuadorian Hospital Malnutrition Study was conducted between November 2011 and June 2012 with 5,355 patients (Women: 37.5%; Ages ³ 60 years: 35.1%; Length of stay £ 15 days: 91.2%) admitted to 36 public hospitals located in the prominent cities of 22 out of the 24 provinces of the country. Malnutrition frequency was estimated by means of the Subjective Global Assessment survey. Results: Malnutrition affected 37.1% of the surveyed patients. Malnutrition was dependent upon patient's age and education level; as well as the presence of cancer, sepsis, and chronic organic failure. Hospital areas showed different frequencies of hospital malnutrition. Health condition leading to hospital admission influenced negatively upon nutritional status. Malnutrition frequency increased as length of stay prolonged. Conclusions: Malnutrition currently affects an important proportion of patients hospitalized in public health institutions of Ecuador. Policies and actions are urgently required in order to successfully deal with this health problem and thus to ameliorate its negative impact upon quality of medical care.

Keywords
Hospital malnutrition, Length of stay, Epidemiology, Cancer, Subjective Global Assessment.