

Author's response to reviews

Title: Reducing unnecessary hospital days to improve quality of care through physician accountability: a cluster randomised trial

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Version: 3 **Date:** 10 August 2012

Author's response to reviews:

Dear Editor,

we are submitting to your attention our paper entitled "Reducing unnecessary hospital days to improve quality of care through physician accountability: a cluster randomised trial", as suggested by the Assistant Editor of BMC Medicine, to which the manuscript had previously been submitted. We are grateful for this opportunity, and for the comments which have enabled us to improve our manuscript. We have responded to the reviewer concerns as follows:

REVIEWER 1

1. We agree that the monocentric design poses important limitations to generalisability, as stated in the discussion section. We have now elaborated further on this point (page 14).
2. We have addressed in the discussion the issue of the lack of a statistically significant measurable impact in the long-term (page 14).

REVIEWER 2

1. We have clarified the choice of audit and feedback as a quality improvement strategy, with reference to the literature (page 4).
2. i) We had indicated in the previous version that the index days were identified by randomization, and that staff was blinded to the index day (page 7); we have now justified the choice of monthly index days in the Data Collection section (page 9).

ii) We have now explained the rationale for considering mortality as a readmission (page 6)

3. We have added the description of the cluster effect on sample size and on the findings, and explained how this effect was taken into account in the analysis (page 10).

In addition, we have presented the rationale for assessing effectiveness at different time periods (page 9).

4. The study progress based on the CONSORT flowchart was actually provided in Figure 1. We have now improved the quality of the figure, as suggested by the Assistant Editor.

5. Actually the cluster effect had been taken into account in our analyses; we have elaborated further on this point in the Statistical Analysis section (page 10).

6. Following the reviewer's indications, we have specified in the abstract that follow-up data "seem to confirm" (and not "confirm") the difference; we agree with this observation as the result was not statistically significant, thus a definitive conclusion cannot be drawn.

7. We have carefully edited the manuscript to improve the style and correct linguistic problems.

We have also followed the Assistant Editor's indications to ensure adherence to the journal style and authors' contributions section, and have added a Consort checklist as recommended.

I thank you for your attention, and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely

Caterina Caminiti