Reviewer's report

Title: A comparison of outcome among patients seen by Cardiologists and General Physicians after acute myocardial infarction

Version: 1 Date: 22 June 2004

Reviewer: Ian Scott

Reviewer's report:

General

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The authors state eligibility criteria for drug treatments (except ACE inhibitors) but not for procedural interventions - why not? Comparing cardiologist with general physician use of the latter is invalid unless there is adjustment for patient ineligibility (esp as the general physicians looked after older patients with greater prevalence of smoking, functional disability and other co-morbidities) and access to such interventions.

Other bias may relate to differences in the level of completeness of medical records between the two hospitals given this was a retrospective chart review (eg were there significant differences between the two in frequency of recorded variables for determining patient eligibility?)

The authors state their objective is to assess 'the effect of access to cardiologists on survival among AMI patients' but Methods says nothing about the provision of cardiology services in either of the study hospitals, their respective AMI caseloads, the numbers of cardiologists and general physicians per patient, the referral links (if any) between the two hospitals, the skill mix and training levels of the junior medical staff, the formal use of audit and other quality improvement strategies. As the authors note in discussion, all these factors may justify the view that 'access to a cardiologist may be a proxy measure of access to effective treatment (or care) and may not (of itself) be the trigger for effective treatment.'

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

None