Reviewer's report

Title: Declining mortality following acute myocardial infarction in the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care System

Version: 1 Date: 13 August 2009

Reviewer: James Rohrer

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This is an interesting paper on an important topic. It is especially salient given the contemporary policy relevance of the government option in health care reform proposals.

However, it contains some areas of ambiguity.

1. Linkage to the Dartmouth Atlas service areas is mentioned, as is area demographic characteristics. However, the analysis presented appears not to use that information. If it was not used, don't mention it in this paper. If it was used, then the tables should include findings related to those data. I hope that adjustment for 'hospital' characteristics does not refer to the community characteristics, since community characteristics reflect an entirely different dynamic than hospital characteristics.

2. The Medicare group appears to have more CHF patients, yet I see no mention of adjustment for a diagnosis of CHF in the results tables.

3. The narrative mentions that the percent with previous heart attacks was known, but none of the tables mention adjustment for previous heart attack. Instead, they mention 'history of heart failure', which presumably means CHF. The results tables should list which variables were included in the model to adjust for patient differences so as to eliminate the concern that perhaps the data analyst was confused about the difference between history of MI and history of CHF. Presumably history of MI and current CHF should both have been included as risk adjustment variables.