Reviewer's report

Title: Postal Survey Methodology To Assess Patient Satisfaction in a Suburban Emergency Medical Services System: an observational study.

Version: 3 Date: 30 March 2007

Reviewer: Jose M. Quintana

Reviewer's report:

General
The authors have improved the manuscript and have followed the suggestions and responded to most of the previously raised questions. In this sense, the manuscript has improved substantially but either the new changes or the previous text still raised some objections to the manuscript to be considered appropriate for publication.

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

Background.
Included a clear justification for the study (apart from previous studies). Why was necessary such research study?

Methods
Briefly, explain in the Methods section how the estimation of the cost of the survey study was estimate. In the Results section provide the specific results that follow that methodology.

Results
Please, provide data on Table 2 with percentages (in brackets, for instance) for all categories included, by year. Also, provide the information related to the exclusion of patients by being a “Repeat customer” separate from those with “No mailing address”; in two different columns.

Though Table 4 try to show the interpretations of the open ended questions, as far as it now it does not provide with valuable information. The authors should made an effort to provide with more clear and interpretable information for readers. Additionally, what means Question A, B or C? And, what are the logics of the responses and categories on each of them? Explain in the text and as a footnote in the Table. Now the Table is not informative at all. And, describe the main findings in the text of the Results section.

Discussion.

What is the value or appropriateness of the short information collected by the survey for quality improvement strategies, taking into account also the non-response?.

On response to my previous suggestion: “The authors must make a deeper discussion in this section on what implies to have a so low answer rate, as well as which one is the optimal one (that obviously does not have to be in a 40%), and have to explain at the end of that section what kind of possible futures studies are necessary in this field“ the authors answered: “.We have not presented an optimal response rate; understanding the optimal response is a matter of balancing resources and needs”. My suggestion was on the direction to request to the authors of the study to make a judgement on the bias that implies the non-answer and how a low response rate can condition a study. Within that discussion they had to put its answer rate in relation to other studies and to those research studies which have indicated which one is the minimum answer rate to guarantee the quality and credibility of a study. On this there is a lot of bibliography. The authors are making a research work and, therefore, the essential is the quality of their information, and the self-criticism of the deficiencies and bias of the study and how to avoid them or improve the study in the future. In relation to their affirmation that “the optimal response is to matter of balancing resources and needs” is necessary to understand that in this case their “needs” are conditional to present valid scientific data. Their discussion must go in that direction and therefore judge what they have got and how to improve it.
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Page 11, 1st parag: I suggest having the information related to the “agreement between the two physicians was high (Kappa > 0.964).” in a separate sentence.

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 whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests