Reviewer’s report

Title: The nature and causes of unintended events reported at ten emergency departments

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Reviewer: Bernhard Frey

Reviewer’s report:

This is an important study. It is not just a list of critical incidents, rather it shows sound methodology which enables clinicians to analyse critical incident reports for root causes and to implement, on this basis, system changes. It is puzzling that the authors found most root causes to be human, because this finding contradicts current knowledge. However the authors discuss this discrepancy adequately.

Minor Essential Revisions: The classification of unintended events into eight classes is somewhat arbitrary, some classes concern the process, some classes concern devices (such as drugs or equipment). At least, the authors should give a short comment regarding this issue in the methods. - The authors state, that the events were analysed by an experienced researcher. Of course, this is a key person in this study. The authors should give some more information on this person (education, current responsibilities/employment; was this person one of the authors?). Page 5, 3rd line (a minimum of fifty reports is recommended to capture...): please reference this statement. Page 5, line 6: have all reported events been discussed with the reporters? -Page 9 (external factors were largely present...): The authors should mention, that external factores may also be in the responsibility of the ED, e.g. proper organisation with external specialists. Page 11, limitations: as the authors acknowledge, non-anonymity regarding the reporters may have led to under-reporting; I wonder, whether anonymity would have yeilded more information, although interviews would not have been possible in this case. - Reference 26 should be deleted from the reference list, because it is only submitted (the authors may nevertheless mention the findings of this study in the text).

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

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.