Reviewer's report

Title: A review of equity issues in quantitative studies on health inequalities: the case of asthma in adults

Version: 2 Date: 5 May 2011

Reviewer: Mel Bartley

Reviewer's report:

Overall, for this reviewer, the paper is very worthy of publication. It raises many issues about aetiological pathways and relates these to questions of equity, which I have not seen done very often.

Major Compulsory Revisions

I would not recommend any major revisions. This paper is bound to cause all kinds of controversy, as at present there seems to be a strong trend in social epidemiology to return to the more 'proximal' causes of health inequality. As I am not an expert in asthma, it is hard for me to say what these would be. However, the kind of thing I am thinking of is smoking, diet and so on. The only slightly more wide ranging comment I would make is to be careful in your recommendations to distinguish between those that would remove inequities in exposures to traffic, pollution and so on, and those which would only re-shuffle the pack. If the authors focus on social mobility, which they seem to do at one point, then they are saying that it is not inequitable for some groups to be more exposed than others as long as the risk is a consequence of low achievement (leading to low wages, poor housing conditions and so on). This is not the same as saying that income should not systematically result in health risk for anyone regardless of how they come by their income level.

Minor Essential Revisions

Perhaps a sentence or two on the relationship between equity and inequality.

Level of interest: An article of importance 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 competing interests