Reviewer's report

Title: The association between survey timing and patient-reported experiences with hospitals: results of a national postal survey

Version: 3 Date: 26 December 2011

Reviewer: M Beckett

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The main concern I have is that the literature review is somewhat misleading. Although it is no longer clear in the most recent draft of the paper, there seem to be only two prior studies that the author cites that measure the relationship between response time and patient reported experiences that use the same mode throughout the follow-up period. One of these is an observational study which finds a negative relationship between response time and patient experiences and a second study which randomizes patients to receive the survey a few days versus more days post-discharge. The experimental study finds no relationship between survey time and follow-up. Earlier versions of this manuscript emphasized that the experimental study was the gold standard, but this version for some reason no longer even makes it clear that there was a prior experimental study. I am perplexed as to why these changes have been made as these changes do nothing to change the general conclusions or recommendations.

The introduction and the conclusion focus undue attention on other prior studies which confound mode with response time, even though in the introduction the author notes that these studies suffer from this limitation. They should only be mentioned once in passing and not again.

I believe I have made this suggestion before, but I think that language may be hampering communication.