Reviewer's report

Title: Observed intra-cluster correlation coefficients in a cluster survey sample of patient encounters in General Practice in Australia

Version: 1 Date: 17 September 2004

Reviewer: John Ioannidis

Reviewer's report:

General

A well-written paper. My comments are mostly minor suggestions:

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

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Abstract: please correct "assocations" and "associations intra-cluster"
2. End of page 4: actually interventions studies also rarely report ICC estimates, e.g. empirical survey by Isaakidis and Ioannidis Am J Epidemiol 2003 or the recent CONSORT extensions by Diana Elbourne at al.)
3. Page 6-7: since the unit of inference is encounters rather than patients, ICC estimates would be substantially affected by the extent to which the same patients are seen more than once within the consecutive series of 100 encounters. Do you have any data on how many these repeat encounters are overall and what their range/distribution is across GPS?
4. On the same point, would it be feasible also to perform analyses estimating ICCs excluding all encounters after the first one for the same patient? This would extend the generalizability of these sensitivity analyses to other community surveys. If this is not feasible, that's OK.
5. In table 1, please show p-values for these two year frames. I suspect there are some significant differences, e.g. for male percentage.
6. Table 3: the NESB abbreviation seems weird, try to use something descriptive.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests: