Reviewer's report

Title: Examining Intra-Rater and Inter-Rater Response Agreement: A Medical Chart Abstraction Study of a Community-Based Asthma Care Program

Version: 1 Date: 25 January 2008

Reviewer: Timothy Lash

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions
1. Under definition of chart abstraction items, the authors defer analysis of medication information such as strength, dose, and duration. This information, however, is usually crucial to an analysis of pharmaceutical effects. They are difficult to abstract accurately, which is exactly the reason that the uncertainty in such abstractions ought to be quantified. If this information is available, then I would ask the authors to reconsider their decision to exclude presentation of these agreement results.

2. Under the inter-rater reliability section, the charts were created synthetically, so the information included in the chart is known with perfect accuracy. Thus, there is a true gold standard, which allows calculation of sensitivity and specificity rather than agreement.

3. The section on data quality and control ought to appear earlier in the methods, under data collection.

4. I strongly recommend against using the categorization of kappa, for the very reasons cited by authors in the discussion. There are many shortcomings to this measure of agreement, which have been well reviewed and ought to be discussed at greater length by the authors. One important shortcoming is that it is impossible to use kappa to adjust for categorical misclassification in other studies, where this study’s agreement data might be useful for sensitivity analysis.

5. Please include in the methods a statement about whether abstractors knew that a record was being re-abstracted for the validity study. Given the proximity in time between initial and re-abstraction, it seems certain they did. What are the implications (for example, might they have worked harder on re-abstractions or recalled their initial recall results, thereby artificially inflating agreement?).

Minor essential revisions
1. The sample for reabstraction is in one place called a convenience sample and in another place called a random sample. Please explain which is the case.

2. The presentation of the results were difficult to plow through in the text. Please review and consider whether they could be presented more clearly.

Discretionary revisions
1. Please insert an antecedent after "this" throughout the text.

**What next?:** Accept after minor essential revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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.