Reviewer's report

Title: Effect of a printed reminder for turning off mobile phone in the waiting room: a before and after study.

Version: 1 Date: 5 December 2008

Reviewer: Rohan Jayasuriya

Reviewer's report:

Reviewers report

The authors report on a study to test the impact of an intervention to change behaviour of patients during medical consultations. The broader topic of physician - patient communication is important and there has been much research. Another area of research is the impact of modern technology in developing country settings. The authors have chosen to address a narrow aspect, the interruption of the consultation due to mobile technology. Overall this is an early study reporting on a very specific aspect, that requires clarification and expansion.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The conclusions are not warranted as there are many unknowns.

a) as it is a before-after (pre-post non experimental design) study, many of the weaknesses have not been acknowledged. The temporal effect of change due to other factors cannot be excluded. Were there other “messages” in the media or even in the rooms (such as reception staff alerting patients). One could have, had a “window period” where the intervention was taken out...to find out if the interruptions returned to the usual level.

b) we are not told how many had mobiles? How many had it switched off? If an exit survey was conducted at the same time this information would have been available.

c) the methods section lacks critical information. As this was in a single practice, of consecutive patients, it is very likely that in a period of five months , there were patients (and relations) who returned. How did the authors control for this bias? If that is the case, the statistical analysis is inappropriate as tests assume independent groups.

d) there are too many factors that would influence the behaviour that have (to the extent reported) not been controlled for. If such data was not collected, then statistical control is not possible.

2. The study is not situated in the wider literature. The authors have not referred to what is already known about patient behaviour and communication. Some of the references are not relevant as they address the content of physician - patient communication not the mechanics (such as interruptions). The role of culture is
not well discussed, it may be that in other interactions, such interruptions are common place. The discussion is weak.

3. Finally, it is of concern that this is not a definitive study, but a preliminary investigation, that may provide valuable in-sight for designing a study. The findings (due to limitations in internal and external validity) do not add to the knowledge in this area, at this time.

- Minor Essential Revisions

There area number of revisions to make it a good academic paper, including improvement to grammar and writing style.

What next?
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Based on your assessment of the validity of the manuscript, what do you advise should be the next step?

- Reject because scientifically unsound
- Reject because too small an advance to publish (note that BMC Family Practice will publish all sound studies including sound negative studies)

Level of interest
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Statistical review
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Is it essential that this manuscript be seen by an expert statistician?
Declaration of competing interests
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