Reviewer’s report

Title: Provided out-of-hours care and associated costs in Switzerland: a cost description study

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Reviewer: John Campbell

Reviewer’s report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this interesting paper which outlines the costs of providing out-of-hours care by GPs in Switzerland (Zurich). The study is generally well presented and undertaken professionally. The results would be of interest to an international audience.

1. Yes

2. Reasonable – some modification is required however. The authors make assumptions about the familiarity of international readers with the Zurich out-of-hours system. This becomes especially unclear in trying to relate the numbers of doctors participating in the study with the number of doctors actually providing the service or collecting data across the data collection periods. Was consent to participate obtained from the GPs? Was the “night physician” included in data collection – or was it just the GP providing the back up service? Which patients were actually included in the data collection – references made on page 5 to the “first, second and last patient”, but is this the first, second and last patient for each GP providing care – how many GPs are providing care at any one time? These type of issues may seem pedantic, but I came away from the methods section not really knowing how the data was collected although with a sense that it had been professionally and competently done! Clarification is needed I think

3. In general, yes. Although the authors do address the issue in the discussion, I would definitely want to know what the characteristics of the patient contacts were where there was insufficient data available for economic analysis – how did these patients compare to the 469 where sufficient data was available? I don’t think it is sufficient just to say there were similar to the whole sample …..

On page 9, I was left with a number of questions in relation to the first paragraph under “cost data”. Some modification in grammar and presentation is required in the second sentence – does this refer to mean costs or some other summary measure? There were significant costs differences – between what and what? What does it mean to say “the relevant determinant of total costs ………..” – this seems to imply some kind of regression modelling which I don’t think has been carried out. Do you just mean that this was “an important predictor of total costs …”? How does the last sentence of this paragraph relate to the preceding sentence?

4. Yes

5. Yes
6. Yes
7. Yes
8. It is not entirely clear that this paper relates to the whole of Switzerland – the work was undertaken in one centre only and so I am not convinced that the results are generalisable to Switzerland. The authors should at least discuss this and defend the assertion made in the title
9. Generally yes, although there are a number of places where attention is needed to the English grammar presentation (eg first sentence, top of page 12). These are minor adjustments however, which should be sorted out by appropriate professional proof-reading.

Finally, I think the authors are a bit too modest in respect of their work – the work should be of interest beyond Switzerland (see page 12), and have wider relevance and have wider relevance than just “Swiss decision makers”. The profile of care is very different from that provided by out-of-hours services in the UK where there is a much higher preponderance of telephone-management, and a very much lower rate of home visiting. In some respects, the high rate of home visiting in the Swiss system is disappointing, and potentially costly. What exactly are the “simple, low-cost measures” referred to on page 12?

The above observations are either discretionary revisions or minor essential revisions. The two major compulsory revisions relate to a more adequate description of the service being provided and a clear comparison of the patient profile where insufficient data is available for economic analysis

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'