Reviewer's report

Title: Home visits - central to primary care, tradition or an obligation? A qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 24 January 2011

Reviewer: Sir Denis PEREIRA GRAY

Reviewer's report:

ASSESSMENT OF ARTICLE SUBMITTED TO BMC FAMILY PRACTICE
HOME VISTS- CENTRAL TO PRIMARY CARE, TRADITION OR AN OBLIGATION BY Theile G et al

Thanks

Thank you for inviting me to assess this article. I am pleased to do so.

Declaration

I have a long standing interest in this subject and have had publications in the British Journal of General Practice and Huisarts en Wetenschap on home visiting.

I do not know the authors and have no conflicts of interest as defined.

Background/Importance

The subject is of continuing interest as home visiting is a component of general/family practice in many countries of the world. It is however seriously under-researched.

The results fit well with what is known about the subject, especially the mixed feelings of general practitioners about home visits and the opinion that they are not adequately remunerated for them (In the UK general practitioners are not remunerated specifically at all for them).

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

Yes

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

Yes. The submission reports a series of interviews with generalist doctors using a reasonable number of doctors, 24, standard techniques are used and also standard transcript analysis techniques eg Atlas.ti

3. Are the data sound?

The data appear reasonable. I have not seen the original transcripts.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The standard of presentation is satisfactory.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

Generally Yes. Given the study was qualitative and the authors are reporting the opinions of the doctors studied.

The authors do report in addition to the serious negative views some important positive opinions like gathering knowledge of the patient’s social circumstances and that patients like home visits.

Personally, I think the discussion should make the point that the whole of this work is doctor orientated, by definition, and that to achieve a full understanding of home visits the perspective of patients needs to be researched as well.

There is no mention of the training offered on the professional assessment of the home in Germany for future general practitioners or whether or not these doctors had had any such training.

The striking findings about the quality of life for residents in the rest homes, merits rather more discussion.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

This study was based in Hanover and entirely within one European country, Germany. The authors do make passing reference to other countries but I suggest should spell out more clearly that their findings are country specific and cannot be interpreted widely even within Europe. For example, general practitioners in Belgium undertake relatively more home visits and British general practitioners do many fewer than 24 home visits a week.

The authors correctly note that their findings are the subjective opinions of doctors and there is no objective evidence on the assessment such as recordings by audio or video of these consultations.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

They cite some relevant publications. One other of note is:


This includes a table showing that [British] patients who had received five or more home visits regarded their general practitioner “as something of a personal friend”.
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

The authors have chosen a challenging title which catches the attention and which is appropriate.

9. Is the writing acceptable?

Not quite. Of course I understand these authors are not writing in their native tongue and I admire their ability to use English. However, international journals must require clarity and whilst the writing is generally clear apart there is a phrase on page 8 “boundaries of self abandonment “ which I did not understand. I suggest this should be re-drafted.

The term “rest homes” is not in line with current use in English where there is a distinction between ‘nursing homes’, where the staff include qualified nurses and ‘residential care homes’ which do not.

It would be helpful if the authors could clarify both the term and the category of establishment or both.

Category

I place this article in the category of: An article of importance in its field.

Statistician

I do not think this manuscript need to be seen by a statistician.

Opinion

I recommend that the article be published.

There is a serious shortage of research on home visits and this work may usefully stimulate more. The need for training for future general practitioners in home visiting may need review.

It raises some important new questions such as the apparently poor quality of life for residents in the “rest-homes”. This may be the nature of these establishments, but it may be an attitude in the doctors or both. In itself this merits research.

Redrafting

I suggest the article be redrafted (compulsory) to deal with the points listed under heading 9.

Secondly, I suggest that the authors be given the opportunity to review the comments made here to see if they wish to widen their discussion (discretionary).

Reviewer

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Words 890

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

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.