Reviewer's report

Title: Inter-contact interval based views on frequent attenders in primary care

Version: 2 Date: 26 August 2013

Reviewer: Marleen Smits

Reviewer's report:

In this article, the authors suggest a new measure, the inter-contact interval between two consecutive contacts, as a basic measure for analysis of contact frequency and applied it on the existing set of routine data.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1

A) In figure 1, the authors explain the difference between the traditional and new measure of frequent attendance. They explain that the traditional way is to count the contacts in a given time period (the marked area on the left side). The new way includes the intervals between the contacts during the whole range of time. I think it is not always possible for researchers to include a broad range of time and the choice to take a fixed time period is often pragmatic (availability of data).

B) Moreover, what range of time should be used when using the new measure? The authors are not clear about that. The periods in their own database vary from 2 to 11 years!

C) In the new measure, a person who, for example, sees the GP every Monday is NOT a frequent attender. For me this is counterintuitive.

D) My conclusion about the new measure is that one can use it with the aim to identify patients who contact primary care for disease-related reasons. When I am interested in unnecessary use of primary care by frequent attenders, I have to look for another measure.

E) I do not feel the authors provide evidence that the new measure is better than the traditional measure. Is it different, not necessarily better.

F) In short, after reading this paper, the authors have not convinced me to use the new measure.

2

The authors did not perform multilevel analysis. Data from 123 general practices were used. The data are therefore layered (level 1: patients, level 2: general practices) and multilevel analyses is recommended to correct for the fact that patients within one general practice are more similar to each other than patients between practices.
3
Suggestion to change the title into “Inter-contact interval measure of frequent attenders in primary care”.

4
The paragraph “comparison with existing literature” predominantly contains further information to interpret the data, and is not a comparison with results from previous studies.

Discretionary Revisions

5
Nr 153/154: The authors arouse pity by stating they spent much time to store the patient information in a database before analyzing. This information is, however, not important for readers of a scientific paper.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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