Reviewer's report

Title: The use of quality information by general practitioners: does it alter choices? A randomized clustered study

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Reviewer: Richard C Turner

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The question posed by this article is relevant for primary care providers practising in densely populated developed countries where a variety of secondary or tertiary care facilities are in close proximity. It should therefore be considered in this cultural context, and perhaps further acknowledgement could be given to this in the Introduction or Discussion (1: discretionary revision).

The Methods section is generally well set out and sufficiently detailed, particularly with regard to the relatively complex statistical analysis. The various independent variables, including proposed interaction terms, are listed on pp 10-11. However the actual analysis or interpretation of these does not seem to be mentioned in the Results section. Some small mention would be desirable to justify the methodology (2: minor essential revision).

The data are well presented. In Table 5, it is noted that the referral institutions are referred to as Hospitals 1-4, rather than by the feigned names given in the Methods section. Naming therefore needs to be made consistent throughout the article (3: minor essential revision). The authors should also check that the numerical data presented in the Tables matches that mentioned in the text e.g. line 4 on p 13: 6.9% (p=0.015) corresponding in Table 6 to coefficient of -0.0066 and p-value of 0.01? (4: minor essential revision). The heading of this Table should also be placed at the top rather than the bottom (5: minor essential revision).

In the Discussion section, the authors state the strength of their study design in comparison to previous similar work. The conclusions drawn from a largely negative result are realistic and adequately discussed. The main limitations of the study were briefly noted. From a methodological point of view, some reflection should also occur as to the purpose or meaning of the “internal” control group, given that an “external” control group of non-respondents was also used, and the results of these appeared to show no real difference (6: discretionary revision).

Other minor issues with syntax or style that should be addressed include (7: minor essential revisions):

P 4 line 5: suggest substituting “benefit” for “favour”.

P 5 line 2: This sentence may be seen as slightly paternalistic and could perhaps be modified.
P 7 line 2: substitute “consists” for “exists”.
P 9 Table 3: “decubitus” should presumably be “decubitus ulcers”.
P 10 line 2: “per condition with the hospital per referral…” This sentence does not appear to make sense.
P 10 para 3 line 4: “an” should be “and”.
P 13 line 4: “a one point better the indicators…” does not make sense and should be re-worded.
P 14 line 3: “radical surgery” presumably means “definitive surgery” – this is a more appropriate expression in English; see also Table 1.
P 14 para 2 line 1: prefer “…clear that aspects other than quality information…”
P 15 para 2 line 3: substitute “which” for “what”.
P 15 para 2 line 4: suggest deleting “the condition”.

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.