Reviewer's report

Title: Current utility of the ankle-brachial index (ABI) in general practice: implications for its use in cardiovascular disease screening

Version: 2 Date: 14 November 2013

Reviewer: Jay Giri

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Summary:
The study assessed performance of ABI by nurses and found that a high percentage of testing is not performed in consistency with guidelines. It is under-utilized for patients who may be at risk for PAD and cardiovascular disease. Additionally, the study assessed physicians' and nurses' knowledge regarding guideline-based medical care for patients with abnormal ABI and found it to be lacking.

Strengths:
The authors investigation into ABI use sheds an important light on PAD awareness, diagnosis, and management. Despite worldwide efforts to improve on these issues over the past decade, the current study demonstrates that much more primarily educational work needs to be done.

Weaknesses:
The response rate was low (20%). Those responding may have more interest in PAD than non-responders, resulting in bias. This appears unavoidable and is a necessary limitation of generalized survey data.

Discretionary Revisions:
The authors note the important finding that ABI is rarely being used as a screen for PAD in patients with LE symptoms or cardiovascular risk factors. It should be noted that US guideline recommendations in these instances are conflicting. While the ACC/AHA recommend usage of the cheap, office-based ABI as a screening tool for defined at-risk populations, the USPTF does not. In the US, the ABI receives a class D recommendation from the USPTF and is not reimbursable as an in-office test for screening. While the Discussion focuses on a detailed technical assessment of the ABI procedure, I believe a section commenting on the above would improve the message of the paper from a policy perspective.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

Nothing to disclose