Reviewer's report

Title: Family doctors' involvement with families in Estonia

Version: 2  Date: 9 August 2004

Reviewer: Mark J Yaffe

Reviewer's report:

General
None

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

(1) The topic under study is an important and relevant one for family physicians to be looking at. As such this particular manuscript needs a little re-orientation from 2 perspectives. The first is that the findings found in this study are similar to what has been reported in similar works done elsewhere. Therefore, the strength of this paper lies in the observation made in the Discussion section that family practice in Estonia is 10 years old and that this is the first time this type of study has been conducted in Estonia. The latter observation, in particular, should appear in the Introduction section to justify why this study should be of interest to readership.

(2) The paper hinges on "family-related" issues. Yet in the Method section no working definition of the broad aspect of "family-related" is provided. Since the latter term can encompass anything including interpersonal relationships, doctor-patient encounters, bio-medical/genetic, etc, the reader is unclear what the focus of the paper will be.

(3) To better understand the concern raised in #2, the reader seeks out in Method section answers to how study variables were chosen. We learn that there were 21 questions asked, but there is no indication as to what they were, why they were chosen (either on the basis of hypotheses or as a result of referring to similar studies done elsewhere), or what the wording of the questions were (in order to better understand the results).

(4) In Methods, what type of randomization was used to generate the seemingly unusual mailing sample of 236 doctors?

(5) The authors likely should clarify who they would like their readership to be. This concern arises because they provide a rather short 12 item reference list, in which 5 of the references come from within their own authorship group. Thus the references may be narrow and lacking in scope. This concern is heightened in the discussion section, in which some comments are made about the findings--but they are not analyzed critically or interpreted in terms of the vast international literature on this topic.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

(1) Again, we need to know who the readership is intended to be. If it is beyond Estonia, issues such as the descriptive doctor demographics in the country are worthwhile to indicate. Since 92% of respondents were women, can the reader assume that the vast number of family doctors in the country are women, and if yes, what does the international literature have to say about how this impacts on "family-related" issues?.... Keeping in mind readership issues, the early part of the Discussion section that revolves around reference #9 might be better in the Introduction to give an overview to health care delivery in Estonia.

(2) "family related" likely should appear as "family-related"
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

(1) Given that there were 21 questions posed (but not identified---perhaps they might be in a Table), what consideration went into the reporting of the 9 variables in Figure 1?

(2) In the reporting of results in the section on "degree of involvement of FDs in family matters", because the specific study questions were not reported, the reader is unclear about the context and the content of this communication. Is it in relation to the doctor communicating with the family about a specific index patient in the family, or about a specific entire family problem? .....The absence of clarity on this makes me feel the need for some part of the discussion section addressing ethical/confidentiality issues.

(3) A little of the English wording is confusing, though usually understandable after a re-read is done. As such, independent editing might improve the paper further.

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**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:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

None