Reviewer's report

Title: Follow-up care by patient’s own general practitioner after contact with out-of-hours care. A descriptive study.

Version: 1 Date: 25 January 2005

Reviewer: Robert K McKinley

General
This is a useful study which contributes additional data on the proportion of people who seek unscheduled care from their own GP in the week following an out of hours consultation and the drivers for this care. Although the paper has its limitations (a modest response rate and the uncertainties which arise when discussing the factors which surround unscheduled primary care consultations) these are explicitly acknowledged and appropriately discussed.

The claims the authors make are modest but appropriate and a useful contribution to the limited literature.

Weaknesses: In the paper I would like the authors to list the variables they included in the logistic regression analysis rather than making a statement that all other variables except for patients’ reasons for attendance were entered in the analysis). As it is, we have no idea how many variables were entered in and hence the power the study is likely to have had.

This study is part of a larger study which included an investigation of patient satisfaction with out of hours care. It would be most interesting to know the relationship between satisfaction and reconsultation, data which I would expect this group to have and I was somewhat surprised that it was not included in this paper.

I would also encourage the authors to consider the implications of these data. If confirmed, it suggests that patients’ dissatisfaction with the diagnosis which was made by the out of hours doctor is an important driver of unscheduled reconsultation. This points towards a potential intervention to try and reduce unscheduled care.

I would also encourage the authors to seek the services of an English-language consultation. There are a number of terminologies which I found confusing. For example, they talk about the ‘dimension of follow up care after contact’ which I take to mean the proportion of patients who seek follow up care. On page 4 they state that the type of consultations patients received have been regularly investigated; rather than recently investigated; and the last sentence of the statistics section was difficult to untangle. I think that it means that patients who were asked to re-attend their doctor were excluded from the analysis.

I have identified one numerical inconsistency. In the first paragraph of the Results section they state that 116 + 236 out of 634 patients were reported to have attended their own GP. These figures were repeated in Fig 1 but from Table 1 it would appear that 232 people re-attended without advice. These figures should be reconciled.

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

List the variables entered in the regression analysis

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

Resolve the numerical inconsistency between the results section, Fig 1 and Table 1

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Report the relationships between satisfaction and re-consultation and the discuss potential for interventions to reduce re-consultation

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No