Reviewer's report

Title: Advanced Access for patients - a practice manager questionnaire

Version: 2 Date: 9 April 2006

Reviewer: Brian McKinstry

Reviewer's report:

General
I wondered if this might be part of a larger study which also explored doctors', nurses' and patients' views of advance access. The focus seems quite narrow and is limited to the process of implementation of AA and what practice managers thought of it. While of interest in N Ireland I am not sure how much it adds to the general knowledge of advance access.

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

Some description of the methods used to validate the questionnaire should be made. Figures relating to the increased use of telephone consulting referred to in the abstract and discussion should be presented in the results.

Several parameters such as limiting appointment booking were analysed against, practice size, rurality, single-handedness and deprivation using univariate analyses, but as these factors are clearly confounded it seems to me it would make much more sense to use multivariate analysis.

In limitations of the study the authors should point out that in UK terms this is a largely rural region with many more single-handed practices than most areas.

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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)

Table 1 the section types of pre-booking is left blank

Figure 1 is very confusing it would be best left out

A better description of the parameters in table 4 should be made. I had to refer to the questionnaire to make sense of them

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Some pieces of information such as the age and gender of practice managers do not seem relevant to me and could be left out. The fact that large practices are more likely to have a fulltime manager than small practices is not novel. Likewise the finding that receptionists were involved in allocating appointments with GPs was about as surprising as the GPs might be involved in seeing them (did they mean planning the appointment system? The questionnaire is certainly not clear).

The authors express some disquiet that not all staff have been “trained” to manage appointments and conclude that training should be provided. I wondered if practice managers completing that part of the questionnaire may have interpreted it differently, not considering “on the job” training as counting. Also surely additional training is only required if a learning need is detected. Unless the authors have some evidence about this perhaps they should leave this out.

The most interesting findings for me was that nurses appear to be used more for triage and seeing patients in the smaller practices than in the larger practices. Not what I would have expected. I wondered if that was particularly true for single-handed practices. If they had this data it would be useful to include it.
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes