General

Dear Sir

Bowel Cancer Screening in England: a qualitative study of GPs attitudes and information and needs. Woodrow et al

This paper is based on a qualitative study of GPs in England, exploring their attitudes and information needs in relation to bowel cancer screening which is slowly being introduced in the UK. It included GPs both from the UK Pilot region and those who had not participated in the pilot at all.

To obtain their sample, investigators sent letters of invitation to 297 GPs practicing in the pilot region as well as using “convenience sampling” to recruit GPs outside this region. The GPs were paid Â£50 for participating. The interviews were conducted by telephone and transcribed verbatim. A number of issues emerged, including:

- the anxiety caused by positive tests,
- potentially low uptake rates,
- participation amongst deprived and ethnic groups,
- increased work load, and the
- significant information needs for both GPs and invitees to make an informed choice about participation.

A couple of points

- I think the sampling strategy needs clarification. Whilst this is a qualitative study where we might be less concerned about the representativeness of the sample, this is indeed a very small proportion of the original 300 GPs who were finally interviewed. While there is some discussion of this in the discussion section, I do think there needs to be a more in depth analysis of the generalisability of these findings.

- Many of the concerns raised by GPs in this study had in fact been addressed in the pilot and its associated evaluation; that is data are available on uptake rates (in the whole group of invitees and amongst various subgroups), levels of anxiety induced by false positive results, numbers of individuals with positive tests who decline colonoscopy etc. I wonder if the study might have been enriched by feeding back some of this existing information to the interviewees and getting their further responses.

- There needs to be more detail given to the analysis of the qualitative data, theoretical approaches etc

Overall, a modest qualitative study which will be of some interest to readers of your journal and which is well timed in terms of the roll-out of the pilot. I think that if the issues I have raised can be addressed, it probably just reaches the threshold of publication.

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

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)