Author's response to reviews

Title: General practitioner practices in requesting laboratory tests for patients with gastroenteritis in the Netherlands, 2001-2002

Authors:

Winette E. van den Brandhof (w.e.vandenBrandhof@students.uu.nl)
Aad I.M. Bartelds (aad.bartelds@xs4all.nl)
Marion P.G. Koopmans (marion.koopmans@rivm.nl)
Yvonne T.P.H. van Duynhoven (y.van.duynhoven@rivm.nl)

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Reviewer 1b

The authors have dealt with a significant number of issues raised in the comments. Although the authors now have mentioned a goal of the study, the problem remains that this goal is still not supported by a hypothesis or a problem definition. Why is it useful to have this information? What is the problem that lies underneath and is to be tackled by the results of the study?

We have altered the last paragraph in the background to more clearly address our goal. Routinely collected laboratory data on stool samples can be better interpreted with the use of our data. Before this study we had no knowledge which patients were asked to submit a stool sample, was this because of severity of the complaints, because of the age of the patients, etcetera. The problem therefore was how to make the best use of the data of the national laboratory surveillance.

The authors state that data first of all can be used to make an assessment of nationwide patterns. Can they state why this is necessary? Surprisingly, while this assessment is announced, I cannot find it in the results or in the discussion.

This is also changed in the background. We meant to say that our data can be used to assess whether the current national guidelines for GP practices should be revised.

Reviewer 3b

The results section remains rather long, full of figures and therefore difficult for the reader to extract the key points. The use of an additional table to display some of the data in the text would be helpful.

We have tried to delete much of the information in the text, that was also available in a table. Therefore, we hope that the text is now more easy to read. We have also added a new table. And in the discussion/conclusion section we have added a table/box with a summary of the article.