Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 20 April 2006

Reviewer: Richard Baker

Reviewer's report:

General

The study addresses an issue that is important to the developers and implementors of guidelines for gastroenteritis. The methods used are appropriate. The sample size is large, and the response rate to the questionnaires was good; these are particular strengths of the paper. The figure and tables are also useful.

The paper is less good at drawing out the significance of the work. The background could say more about why the study is needed and of importance, and say something about what the authors hoped to discover. Explicit hypotheses might be considered. In the results section, a lot of information is included in the text. It would be easier for the reader to appreciate the important messages if less detail were in the text, with more data and significance tests being shown in the tables. Some thought could be given to use of regression techniques rather than just descriptive statistics, for example in investigating the reasons for ordering tests (page 7/8). The discussion is rather long and does not draw out the key findings very clearly. Sub-headings might help, and a more focused background plus tighter results section would enable the discussion to be made clearer. The implications of the findings for the content of the revised guidelines could be made more explicit, perhaps in a box.

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

The background, results and discussion section need some re-drafting to clarify and bring out the important issues. This should not be a difficult or prolonged task, and requires no new analyses. Reference to a difference that was not statistically significant (newborns and cryptosporidium) should be re-considered.

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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)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Consider the possibility of regression analysis for some issues, and also consider the possibility of stating hypotheses in the background.

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: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.