Reviewer's report

Title: Nurse telephone triage in out-of-hours GP practice: determinants of independent advice and return consultation

Version: 1 Date: 6 October 2006

Reviewer: geertjan wesseling

Reviewer's report:

General

In this well-written paper an analysis is presented of nurse telephone consultations on the ten most frequently presented medical problems during out-of-hours GP practice in one out-of-hours GP cooperative in the Netherlands. As could be expected, a substantial number of cases (27.5 %) presented through telephone contacts were dealt with by the nurse, only to be authorized afterwards by the GP on call. More complex cases including chest pain, shortness of breath and localized abdominal pain and older patients were referred to the GP. No associations between nurse telephone consultations only and sex or type of insurance of the patient, distance to the GP cooperative or background or experience of the 8 nurses in this cooperative were found. More patients reported to their own GP after having been dealt with by the nurse only (33.8 %) than after a contact with the GP (26.9 %), but considering the fact that the GP saw more complex cases and older patients, one could have expected the reverse to be the case.

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)

In my view there is no substantial inter-nurse variation. The remark in the conclusion section in the abstract suggests otherwise.

The sentence: During the study period, the telephone triage was performed by one of eight nurses who…… in the methods/setting section is confusing. All eight nurses participated but always only one at a time.

Figure 1 is not easily understood. Do we need the 3 research questions to be depicted in this way> The 3 types of GP consultations (telephone, centre consultation and home visit) are best mentioned in the text and omitted from the figure.

The second part of the legend to figure 2 is best omitted, only to be represented in the text.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential 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