Reviewer's report

Title: Why do patients want to have their blood tested? A qualitative study of patient expectations in general practice

Version: 3  Date: 23 August 2006

Reviewer: peter salmon

Reviewer's report:

General

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)

Having been freed from the categorisations provided by the authors’ previous theoretical background, the analysis comes to life much better. It would, however, be more persuasive were the data – quotes from patients – to be somewhat expanded and then integrated into the text or presented, annotated, in a separate table. Leaving the quotes to the end of each section seemed to me not to do most justice to them.

The discussion is helpful, but it now majors on the methodological limitations and strengths of the paper and there is scope for developing the findings a little more. Tests emerge from this paper as providing certainty, and therefore being valued more where the relationship with the GP is such that the GP cannot alone provide a sense of certainty. I think that Rhodes’ paper, which the authors now cite, is relevant to the present results because it describes the metaphor of visibility of the body which gives tests their ability to convey certainty. In patient 10501 (p11) there is also the sense that tests provide a way of ‘doing something’, although the authors do not pursue this. I wondered whether they had any other data that might illuminate this function of the tests. I did not recognise or understand the ‘crystal ball’ in the reference to Salmon [20] (p14) and I think that this whole sentence would be better removed unless it can be clarified.

A minor point about language: that a wait and see policy was ‘not always’ favoured leaves is unnecessarily ambiguous – I think the authors are saying that it was rarely favoured.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'