Reviewer's report

Title: A before and after study of the impact of academic detailing on the use of diagnostic imaging for shoulder complaints in general practice.

Version: 1 Date: 31 May 2006
Reviewer: Elaine Hay

Reviewer's report:

General
This is a nicely written paper which highlights the difficulty inherent in changing practitioners' clinical behaviour. A major limitation of this study, which the authors acknowledge, is the "before and after" study design, particularly as the GPs who volunteered for the study were clearly different to a comparison group of GPs in with respect to their clinical behaviour. This has implications for the feasibility of implementing this academic Detailing aimed at reducing imaging requests for patients with shoulder complaints. If the authors failed to show a sustainable reduction in numbers of requests, to levels below the "average" number of requests in a group of motivated GPs who volunteered for the programme is seems inherently unlikely that this approach will have any useful effect if rolled out to the GP population at large.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)Figure 1 is confusing. Unless I am misinterpreting this it looks as if the number of XRay requests dropped substantially but then rose to pre AD levels in the intervention group but did not change in the control group over time. The pattern looks very similar to that shown for ultrasound and I don't understand why the interpretation of the findings are different. Could the authors check that the lines are correctly labelled and, if they are, explain why I am having difficulty understanding this figure. It might help if the control and intervention groups were allocated different colours and labelled as "XRay" or "ultrasound" rather than MBS...

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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)
In the abstract, Results: 2nd line it would be clearer if the term MSK was replaced by shoulder.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.