Reviewer’s report

Title: Out-of-hours demand for GP care and emergency services: patients choices and referrals by general practitioners and ambulance services

Version: 1 Date: 23 March 2007

Reviewer: David Dunt

Reviewer’s report:

General

This article I believe makes a valuable contribution to better understanding the place of the family doctors (GPs) and hospital emergency departments in the delivery of After hours care. It is unusual to have two datasets with comparable coding schemes) such as these one covering a GP cooperative providing all (it would seem) of GP care and the three hospital emergency departments all of the ED care for a defined population. Its conclusions (subject to point 3 below) are likely to be broadly correct. I have only one relatively minor point, one important question and one major reservation

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

1 My main point concerns the fact that the analysis is restricted to bivariate. The two matching datasets and coding schemes cry out for multivariate analysis following the merging the two datasets. It is very likely to provide further insight and modification of the study findings, being based as they currently are on crude analysis.

2 Presumably the three hospital emergency departments bordering the region provide care to patients attending from outside the region. Does the dataset include such these patients? If not this is an important point that needs to be stated in the study along with the appropriate caveats for the study’s conclusions that their existence in the ED population dataset requires.

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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)

There are some small differences (3%) in the over 65 population between the town of Velsen and the Netherlands that could nevertheless be important in the delivery of AH care.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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 importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'