Reviewer's report

Title: Understanding the work of general practitioners: A social science perspective on the context of medical decision making in primary care

Version: 1 Date: 16 August 2007

Reviewer: Margaret Maxwell

Reviewer's report:

General
This is a well constructed paper of international relevance. The paper seeks to offer understanding as to how previously identified factors affecting GP's decisions operate, firstly via primary effects and secondly via intentional and unintentional consequences. This adds to existing knowledge within this field of research.

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

Given the central focus which consultation time plays in impacting on GP practice and driving unintentional consequences, this paper would benefit from a more thorough exploration of the literature relating to consultation times (or fast and slow doctors) and outcomes.

There are two instances in this paper where very specific quantitative data is cited in support of their arguments (p15 and p16). The authors should describe how they collected or came by this data. The statement on p16 which states "a difference of 5 minutes in the length of the consultation is enough to modify a GPs approach and attitude" is particularly worrying in this regard. Many researchers who have conducted large and complex studies of consultation times, processes and outcomes may take issue with this.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Anxiety and self-esteem as predominant facets and preoccupations shaping Gp professional experiences is brought out in the discussion but perhaps not as explicitly in the findings section. I'm not sure confidence over knowledge and skills equates with 'self esteem'(as might be defined within mental health promotion literature), perhaps a change in terminology is required here.

There are some instances where it is unclear whether the authors are making a point of interpretation/reflecting on potential consequences of actions or reporting actual descriptions from transcripts. E.g. p12 first para - are certain patient
groups or diseases actually excluded by GPs, do they have statements to that effect?

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, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.