Author’s response to reviews

Title: Defining frequent attendance in an average general practice: a validation study

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Dear Dr. Da-Silva,

First we want to express our best wishes for the New Year! We appreciate the opportunity to publish our article on BMC family practice. We like to thank all three reviewers for their comments, which were very useful to us. Below we will answer the questions and remarks of your letter in detail.

We added a title page with authors, affiliations and e-mail addresses and full details of the corresponding author.

We added a statement about ethics in the methods section. Approval of our study however is not necessary according to Dutch law, because no patients were involved. The second national study had full ethical approval; this has been described in earlier papers.

We added acknowledgements.

Below we will elaborate on the comments made by the reviewers

Reviewer 1: Moyez Jiwa

As the reviewer did not find the title helpful we rephrased it.
We explained what we meanted by inadequate heath care use and added references to make this expression more relevant to the readers.

We rephrased the expression small age-groups. We added a paragraph about the importance of identifying frequent attenders (FA) in the introduction. We added a description of the literature about intervention on FAs with references.

We also added a sentence about the organization of Dutch health care, but we think that we should not elaborate on this topic. It has been done very often and more is not necessary to understand this article. We already explained in the
introduction why it is useful for GPs and researchers to select FAs.

The reviewer challenges us with his call for more firm conclusions. We feel however, that we concluded what is possible from our data. We state, that the reader can decide for him/herself what minimal precision is needed given the purpose of his/her study or intervention. But using six sex-age groups is the minimum when one wants to identify exceptional consultation rates. This statement is in contrast with previous research (f.e. by Howe). We now describe which FAs are missed with a simple method of selection.

Reviewer 2: Thomas O'Dowd

This reviewer does not understand why we used 4 x 4 tables to calculate sensitivity and specificity of the different methods for selecting frequent attenders. We did so to show differences in net gain between the methods and to show incorrect classification for each method. In the first draft we added the tables as background material, in the definitive version of the article we left them out.

There obviously is some disagreement between the reviewers on this topic (as the third reviewer found our way of presenting the results helpful). In the discussion we now describe the different points of view of GPs and researchers towards selecting FAs.

We added a reference to the sentence about inadequate health care use in the introduction.

Reviewer 3: Phil Heywood

We thank Dr. Heywood very much for his kind comments. He did not recommend any changes.

We hope that we fulfilled all criteria and that you will be able to publish our article in due time.

With best wishes,

Frans Smits