Reviewer's report

Title: Predicting nursing home admission: a meta-analysis

Version: 2 Date: 28 March 2007

Reviewer: Christianna Williams

Reviewer's report:

General

The work is generally sound and the paper clearly written. I believe the paper is of limited interest because the authors cannot adequately address the substantial heterogeneity in effect estimates for many key risk factors. As such, I'd rather read a comprehensive systematic review with more qualitative synthesis of effects across studies with greater attention for why research findings may differ across studies - different measures, different outcome definitions, different populations, different regulations...

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

None.

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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)

1) Some of the numbers on Figure 1 do not match the text. Text says 3861 reports excluded; figure says 3859. Text says 99 reports included; figure says 99. They need to match.
2) Abstract: First line - Backgrounds should be Background
3) p. 5 second to last line, review should be reviews
4) In results involving logistic regression, authors should revise language to speak in terms of increased odds rather than increased likelihood. For example, on p. 13, an OR of 3.25 does NOT mean that those with 3+ ADL dependencies are "3.25 times as likely" to enter a nursing home - it means they have 3.25 times the odds. Depending on the incidence rate (see point 1 under discretionary), the odds ratio may be substantially overestimating the risk ratio.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1) OR's and HR's would be MUCH easier to interpret if the reader had a better sense of the overall rates of NH placement - it MIGHT be possible to reconstruct this from Table 1, but it would be much preferable if authors could report some type of outcome rate -- ideally in terms of person-time (i.e. x.xx events per 100 person-years of follow-up) but if this is not possible then at least a % over a designated period of time).
2) A related point is that if there are substantial differences among studies in the outcome rates, this could lead to substantial heterogeneity in the OR's -- even if the risk ratios were identical. I believe this possibility should be addressed.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

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