Reviewer's report

Title: The role of hospital midwives in the Netherlands

Version: 2 Date: 10 November 2010

Reviewer: Eileen Hutton

Reviewer's report:

The authors have made several important improvements and clarifications to the paper.

I believe however there remains a problem with regards to the interpretation of the findings around assisted births.

The authors state in the paper:

"To find out whether the involvement of midwives with births in secondary care can help to prevent interventions, a prospective study is needed. But we did find that the steady increase after 2001 of the number of midwives working in hospitals coincided with a decrease in the percentage of instrumental births in secondary care (Table 3). This is not simply the result of an increasing number of births in secondary care, with a stable number of interventions. As can be seen in Table 1, the number of births in secondary care first increased, with a peak of 116,000 children born in 2000, then decreased again. The number of assisted births (only occurring in secondary care) followed a similar pattern, with an increase leading to a peak in 2001, followed by a steady decrease. However, the rate of assisted births also changed, not only in secondary care as is shown in figure 3, but also in the population at large. The percentage of instrumental births, calculated on all births in the Netherlands decreased from 26.6% in 2001, via 25.6% in 2004, to 24.9% in 2007 (results not shown)."

The relevant point is not what happened to the raw numbers (increase followed by a decrease) but what the proportion of births in secondary care did. In fact, the proportion of births in secondary care have steadily increased, with the exception of 1999 (0.59 to 0.65). Thus, if we assume that assisted birth remains at a steady state, with a certain number of women in the total population needing an assisted birth (meaning that the numerator should not change), then, as you shift the number of women from primary care into secondary care, the denominator (the number of women in secondary care) increases resulting in a smaller proportion of women in secondary care having an assisted birth, which is what was observed. I recommend that the rates of children born in secondary care (percentage of all births) should be added to table 3 as it has been to table 1, and that a sentence be added to reflect that what is observed could be explained by this phenomena. It is helpful that the whole population rates have been examined, and these should be emphasized to support the point that it may be increased midwifery attended births has helped to lower (marginally) the overall
population rate of assisted births.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.