Reviewer's report

Title: Women's experience of maternity care services

Version: 1 Date: 16 September 2008

Reviewer: Eugene R. Declercq

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Major Revisions

This paper seems to be struggling somewhat to be two articles in one. Both are interesting but they fit uncomfortably together here. On the one hand it presents a descriptive study of the pathways of maternity care in the Netherlands. On the other it examines the viability of using a new measure of quality of care adapted from two currently in use. The descriptive study is interesting to me since I work in comparative maternity care but I’m not sure it will be of great interest to a wider audience. If the author were to focus on the descriptive perspective, I would recommend three steps to strengthen that approach:

(1) supplement the introduction with more information on past studies maternity care in the Netherlands (DeVries & her own past work), which would help readers get a sense of whether or not the findings represent a continuation of a trend or a break from the past thereby adding context to, for example, the ultrasound finding;

(2) likewise, in the conclusion she might discuss how different the Dutch system is from other systems, citing the findings from the other surveys she cites; and

(3) she might want to present more data on the representativeness of her findings beyond the assertion of similarity in age and parity perhaps with a comparative table that could be included in an online appendix.

If the author wants to pursue the validation of the adapted CQI measure she should provide more background on the measurement challenges in this area in the introduction and more discussion of the analysis that led to the dropping of the accessibility, communication and information measures form the analysis. In essence she could write a methods paper on the need for such a measure and the challenges faced in developing it. To the extent that it addressed the special problems that arise in applying this to maternity care it might be of interest to readers of this journal, and certainly of interest to those interested in CQI measures in general.

Specific Issues

BMCPC Questions

Question posed well defined?

As noted above there are really two questions in this paper and both could be
developed further

Methods Appropriate and Well Defined?

More discussion of the measurement issues at work in developing and testing the CQI scales ad a better explanation of the representativeness of the sample would help. Sample size seems adequate for questions posed.

Data Sound & Meets Standard Reporting Requirements?

Response rates seem reasonable, though the language around the timing of the surveys was somewhat vague

Discussion & Conclusions Balanced?

As noted above, the author tries to address both types of dings in her discussion and conclusions

Limitations clearly stated?

Not clearly noted

Acknowledge prior work?

Author describes the context in which the project was developed.

Title and Abstract clear?

Title is okay though it might mention the Netherlands. Abstract should be clearer about what the scales referred to mean. It simply states scores on a treatment scale were high – not sure someone seeing the abstract would know what a “multi-treatment scale” meant without context.

Writing Acceptable?

English was a little rough in a couple of places but could be addressed with minor editing.

Other Points

• Could have used more of an explanation (top p. 6) of how the composite measures were constructed, particularly if the authors want to emphasize the measurement aspects of the project.

• Was seeing a gynaecologist more than once (36% Table 1) the same as regular check-ups (36% results sections middle p. 6) or was that a coincidence?

• For readers less familiar with the Dutch system of home births, how can 15% of mothers giving birth at home report (mid p. 7) not knowing their birth attendant? Presumably this would be from group midwifery practices but a sentence making that clear would help.
• The author in the discussion might note the substantive significance of the findings of difference in treatment during labor scores. The differences are clearly statistically significant but it’s hard to interpret the meaning of a difference between 3.6 and 3.8 for example.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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'