Reviewer's report

Title: Delay factors in the diagnosis and treatment of symptomatic colorectal cancer

Version: 1 Date: 30 May 2012

Reviewer: Una Macleod

Reviewer's report:

The authors are to be congratulated on conducting a well designed patient pathway study investigating diagnosis in colorectal cancer. The work reported here represents a huge amount of work.

Major compulsory revisions:

Further clarification is needed regarding:
- why was this study done? As they demonstrate there is a considerable body of literature covering this topic - much of it old and poorly conducted.
- It would be useful to frame this study in the theoretical frameworks that underpin the literature on time to diagnosis eg. Andersen et al and Walters et al
- Recently, some authors have been trying to move away from the use of the term 'delay' which in common English use has a pejorative tone to it. It is therefore unpopular with patients as it implies that they took a deliberate decision to not seek help, which is often not the case.
- Methods: how was patient pathway data obtained if interviews were not conducted? Did the authors obtain consent to access these data?
- Discussion: This could be a lot shorter. In particular it needs to be clearer about:
  o What this study is adding to the literature on this topic, in particular to the systematic literature review conducted by Mitchell et al. I would suggest they only cite high quality literature.
  o What associations they have found that may be spurious. For example, confidence in GP and reduced delay – but patients have been interviewed after diagnosis and other work (Browne et al) demonstrates that a long process to diagnosis results in less confidence in the GP. Also, intestinal obstruction and reduced time to diagnosis – diagnosis has to be made within hours, or the patient dies.
  o What are the implications of this paper for research and practice?

REFERENCES


Patients’ needs following colorectal cancer diagnosis: where does primary care fit in? Br J Gen Pract 2011; DOI: 10.3399/bjgp11X606582


Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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,