Reviewer’s report

Title: Access to Eye Health Services among Indigenous Australians: an Area Level Analysis

Version: 2 Date: 2 December 2011

Reviewer: Akbar Fotouhi

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General comment

I would like to thank the editor for the opportunity of reading this manuscript. The paper addresses an important issue regarding inequity of health care utilization in a minority group in Australia. The paper is formed by presenting some indirect evidences for showing inequity in eye care services and utilization indexes in different areas in Australia. I consider the study an ecological study with its strength and weaknesses. Its limitation should be addressed in the discussion as I talk about it bellow.

Major comments

1. My concern is the use of word “access” through out the paper. It seems that the presented data imply to utilization not access. By presented data we can see inequity of eye care utilization not access to it and this is right for title of paper and other part of paper. The only presented information which can imply to access is the distribution of ophthalmologist and optometrists by areas in Australia.

2. The paper shows inequity of eye care utilization by region in Australia and it is indirect evidence regarding the inequity of eye care utilization among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This should be acknowledged in discussion considering its limitation in cross level inference. I mean this is evidence in aggregate level and does not grantee the same meaning in the individual level.

3. The conclusion of abstract needs to be more relevant to presented data. The conclusion is general and while the statements are probably right but are not directly based on the presented data. No information has been presented to decide if the disparity in utilization is because of the lack of access or lack of awareness people or it is because of a behavioral barrier. Based on which data do the authors conclude community education might reduce reluctance to seek help? The same problem can be seen in the conclusion statements at the end of discussion.

4. The authors should be a bit more careful about only mentioning things in the discussion that follow from their results. For example they mention in discussion “Broadening the range of health professionals able to obtain reimbursement through Medicare is a key strategy of the reform of the Australian health system [19]. Optometrists were one of the first groups of health professionals other than
doctors to be able to access Medicare. These data suggest that this strategy may have reduced the gap in access to services, although it certainly has not closed it.” This might be likely to be true, but nothing in the study demonstrates it.

5. The result section of abstract needs to be more precise and numerical findings should be presented.

6. I am not sure if analyses of Eye Health Practitioners are sound enough. Is not a spatial analysis needed to show if there is some sort of clustering to show the disparity between areas. The figure 1 and 2 are not enough informative to show what the authors mean. That is, how can an observer find out the concentrated areas are not the same areas with more people there? The problem of figure 2 is more serious to show what the authors see in it.

7. Figure 3 can be deleted because it does no add more to table 1.

Minor comments

1. Page 5, paragraph 2: A full stop is needed after “… (Eye exams (104,105,106,107,108,109 by ophthalmologists))”.

2. Page 6, paragraph 5, line 2: “the” is repeated.

3. Page 7: Considering the journal style, I do not think that footnote is permissible in the body of paper.

4. Page 7, footnote 1: Replace “avergaes” with “averages”.

5. Page 10, third paragraph: This sentence “There was also some evidence that eye problems may have to be severe before help is sought.” needs reference(s).

6. Page 11, line 3: Authors probably meant “Even though” from “Even through”.

7. Table 1: What does IRR mean? Please explain in the table footnote. SEIFA were explained in Abstract, but it needs to be clear in the table footnote.

8. As per the journal style, please provide address for references 1 and 21.

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.