Reviewer's report

Title: Does monitoring Need for Care in patients diagnosed with severe mental illness impact on Psychiatric Service Use? Comparison of monitored patients with matched controls.

Version: 1 Date: 24 November 2010

Reviewer: Abraham Rudnick

Reviewer's report:

First, I would like to state that, to my mind, this article is important as part of a growing body of practice and research related to the use of outcome measurement to facilitate improved care, program evaluation and system change in relation to mental health services. The article suggests that assessment of psychiatric patients' needs and other parameters related to them, such as severity of psychopathology, increases outpatient services use but not inpatient services use. Below I note a few concerns I have with the article as submitted for my review:

Minor essential revisions -

1. The authors mention in the abstract and elsewhere that they are interested in efficiency of services, but they seem to have measured an indicator of effectiveness, at least as approximated by intervention-induced service use (particularly as related to inpatient service use). The authors should either clarify in the article why they use the notion of efficiency, or replace it with the notion of effectiveness (or possible cost-effectiveness, although cost was not directly noted in the article, and the authors end the article with the statement that cost-effectiveness should be evaluated).

2. The authors should elaborate on and possibly explain (on page 4 in the third paragraph) their expectation that results would depend on duration of previous treatment.

3. The authors should delete the second paragraph on page 6 (starting with "Ethical...") as it practically repeats sentences written in the previous page, and in those sentences in the previous page they should add whether the patients signed consent or not.

4. The authors should clarify what they mean by moderate mental illness or give examples, rather than only reference that, on page 8 (near the top).

5. The authors should clarify on page 8 near the bottom why they set the alpha at 0.1 rather than the more standard 0.05.

6. The authors should complete incomplete references (such as reference 6, where volume/issue number is missing, and reference 10, where volume/issue number and page numbers are missing).

Discretionary revisions -
1. The authors should consider deleting the statistical testing results from the abstract.

2. The authors should consider replacing the word impairment with the word functioning (on page 5, in the 4th last line), in line with the WHO definitions of these terms.

3. The authors should consider deleting the word slightly (in the 5th line of the second paragraph on page 10), as it is not clear how they can estimate that, or clarify why they think it is only slightly.

4. The authors should consider adding a reference at the end of page 10, to empirically support their empirical claim in that sentence.

5. The authors should consider adding an elaboration on which inpatient care differences are apparent in countries with more bed capacity (in the 2nd paragraph on page 11).

6. The authors should consider empirically grounding their explanation that "The differences in care consumption between the CNCM and NN regions can indicate an overcapacity of inpatients beds in the CNCM region" (in the last paragraph on page 12), because if that is not the true empirically, their explanation is not sound; I assume such local data is available publicly or otherwise.

7. The authors should consider adding a qualification to their proposal that professional carers be deployed variably in inpatient or outpatient care, as this solution may tempt professional carers to overuse inpatient services, and as inpatient work does not usually lend itself fully to such flexibility (considering that some professional carers such as nurses have to work in shift schedule as part of inpatient work).

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.