Reviewer's report

Title: An examination of the patterns of psychiatric emergency service use by multiple visits patients as a means for their early detection

Version: 1 Date: 21 August 2007

Reviewer: Ronny Bruffaerts

Reviewer's report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. The authors report upon different 'patterns of use' but the only variable they include in these 'patterns' is the number of visits. I would strongly suggest that they modify this. What they are investigating is the effect of the number of visits, but not an actual pattern of service use. A 'pattern' includes a more elaborated investigation of pathways of use. An question may be whether the authors have data on other patterns of use, such as the number of visits with outpatient or inpatient care, or in continuity of care. If we look at patients with multiple visits (also in the PER), continuity of care may be an important explanation of the revolving door phenomenon (see for instance our own research Bruffaerts et al., 2004; 2005 - but also other significant studies).

2. Another important issue is the question of validity and reliability of the assessments made in the psychiatric emergency room. I am well aware of the restraints of assessing mental disorders in the PER, but I would strongly suggest that they discuss this in their discussion section. For example, the assessments of schizophrenia and personality disorders may be a problem in the PER, although there is sufficient evidence that these disorders show considerable cross-temporal stability.

3. On page 6, the authors mention that 'patients underwent triage in the medical emergency department'. Can the authors elaborate on what exactly happens in this triage (by who is this done? how accurate are these activities etc)?

4. Clinical and policy implications are missing. These must be specified.

5. It is necessary to include more information on the statistical methods used. For instance, the authors state that they have used odds ratios in 2x2 tables. Are these crude ORs or are they adjusted for other variables? (I may hope so, because 2x2 results may be biased considerably when they are not controlled for other variables). I suggest that, per research question, the authors describe how and what they did statistically to analyse this question. E.g. which variables were used as dependent, independent, and control variables? ...
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. In general, the tables are hard to interpret.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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