Reviewer's report

Title: An Approach to Measure Compliance to Clinical Guidelines in Psychiatric Care.

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Reviewer: Mark Agius

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They give a very good account of the audit process used in the implementation of guidelines for the treatment of depression.

Previously it used to be believed that the simple dissemination of guidelines to health professionals did not lead to change in practice- a fact which they have indeed shown in their control groups.

On the other hand, they have demonstrated that an active implementation policy and audit process, using groups for benchmarking , and defined process measures, measured over an established time for implementation , does indeed lead to change.

Such a process will of course need to be implemented repeatedly over time, in order to establish that change has been maintained.

The use of statistics is appropriate; it demonstrates that audit should be amenable to a statistical process., and the results of the audit should be able to be proven statistically to show change.

This is important because papers such as this are crucial for showing that evidence based medicine works and that the health of the population can be improved as a result, but there is the risk that such papers may be seen as somehow sitting between audit and research-with all the quality restrictions which some medical editors may insist on putting on their publication [were all the patients whose notes were reviewed asked to give informed consent? for instance].

However, such restrictions are spurious in the case of audit, and indeed might stand in the way of publishing what is in fact the development of a new methodology for the implementation of change through evidence based medicine.

I therefore applaud the editors for proposing to publish this work , and urge its speedy publication.

I would add that I have an interest in this; I have an interest in such types of clinical audit, and have long advocated the approach taken by Forsner et al. Their paper has encouraged me to submit my own paper, which deals with a related field; that of treating Early Episodes of Psychosis.

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