Reviewer's report

Title: Variation of cataract surgery costs in four different graded providers of China

Version: 3 Date: 31 May 2010

Reviewer: Denis Zmirou-Navier

Reviewer's report:

General comments:

This paper describes and compares the costs of cataract surgery across 4 eye clinics located in 2 Chinese provinces. While the matter that is raised is of high interest (is there an association between recourse to cataract surgery and its cost and mode of financial coverage?), it is essentially a descriptive document that presents what the authors found but does not put these findings in context. The paucity of the references that are quoted (7) suggests the authors made no effort to undergo a literature review to design their study or to interpret their findings.

As it stands, the paper falls short of basic requirements for publication in an international scientific journal. However, because of the potential it offers for the improvement of health care delivery and coverage in China and other emerging countries, recommendations are made to better meet publication criteria.

Major Compulsory Revisions

A literature review should be made and used in the introduction chapter and, in more detail, in the Discussion. This review, in the introduction, would give some evidence on the relationship between costs and costs coverage of eye therapy (and cataract surgery in particular, if possible) and national, regional and/or social disparities in treatment usage; it would also give examples of how this topic has been explored by different authors, as a way to justify the methodological approach chosen in this work. In the discussion section, the literature review would back or help to interpret the findings of the authors in view of strengthening their call “for more financial support (to) the New Rural Cooperative Medical Schemes to raise the ratio of reimbursement”.

The Methods section is much too short and should give more detail on the sources of data used to assess the different surgery and associated costs and to ensure their comparability.

Minor Essential Revisions

Methods section: The cases of outpatient surgery should not be included in the study since they are found only in one clinic; the numbers are very low anyhow.

In general, the paper could be improved after some English idiomatic editing.
Discretionary Revisions

Methods: The average cost at each clinic has been calculated during the month of November 2009. Please make the case that the figures for the month of November are stable (and similarly so across the 4 clinics) along the year.

Last paragraph, same section: That the incomes estimates of clinics’ patients are not personal but are average values drawn from statistics per province and urban or rural location of residence should be clearly stated. It is implicit in the results section.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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

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