Reviewer's report

Title: A comparison of patient recall of smoking cessation advice with advice recorded in electronic medical records

Version: 1 Date: 10 November 2010

Reviewer: David DB Coultas

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The overall goal of the analysis described in this manuscript was to examine the effectiveness of the financial incentive provided to GPs in the UK to document offering smoking cessation advice in an electronic medical record. Effectiveness was assessed using patients’ self-reports of receiving cessation advice from a health professional at their GP surgery compared to physician documentation of providing smoking cessation advice. Patient self-reports were obtained from Primary Care Trust patient surveys conducted by the NHS in 2004, 2005, and 2008. GP documentation was obtained from the Health Information Network (THIN) database of EMRs from 446 general practices throughout the UK. Overall, patient self-reported recall of receiving advice was lower than GP documentation of offering smoking cessation advice.

The strengths of this paper are the high clinical and public health relevance, and the large sample size representative of the UK population.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Methods, first paragraph: Have there been any smaller scale direct observation validation studies conducted of the Read codes? If so, it would be useful to reference. If not, this may deserve greater consideration in the discussion.

Discussion, paragraph 5: The discussion may be strengthened by greater consideration of the literature on discordance between patient and physician recall of smoking cessation advice. For example, longer duration of advice and visit type may be associated with recall (Flocke, Stange. Prev Med 2004;38:343-9).

Discussion: The results of this analysis call into doubt the effectiveness of the financial incentive to promote smoking cessation advice and thus have major public policy implications. However, the ultimate effectiveness of the incentive policy is the prevalence of smoking, which decreased during the period of this analysis, and not patients’ self-report of receiving smoking cessation advice. Therefore, the relevance of these results may be questioned by some and this issue deserves greater consideration in the discussion.

References, #11: This reference is not in J Epidemiol Community Health or in PubMed.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.