Reviewer's report

Title: Reliability of Routinely Collected Hospital Data for Child Maltreatment Surveillance

Version: 1 Date: 28 October 2010

Reviewer: Angelo Giardino

Reviewer's report:

This study of the reliability of what is coded as child maltreatment using the ICD-10-AM classification system is a very value addition to the health services literature in this area. Building off of a previous study using one years worth of Australian hospital data and using the ICD system to identify child maltreatment cases, these authors have done yeoman's work at then selecting an appropriate sample of actual medical records to then go back and determine if in fact what was coded in the administrative data sets matches up to what is documented in the medical record. The good news for health services researchers and clinicians is that disagreement was found in only 3.6% of the cases when looking at assigning a definite or probable maltreatment code vs. no maltreatment. To those of us who use administrative data sets, this is reassuring. As with all health services work, the drill down on the data is also instructive and in this study 15.5% of the cases were re-coded to either a more or less definite category of maltreatment, but still with maltreatment risk present. Psychological abuse and neglect had the greatest variation between original coder and study coder determinations and sexual abuse had the highest level of reliability. This work provides is important because it helps construct the evidence based for our confidence that using administrative data sets such as large compilations of hospital data that are readily available may in fact be one credible way to get at how many children are being maltreated and to what forms of maltreated are they being subjected. The authors are to be congratulated for a solid piece of scholarly work that will be used by others in the field to support additional studies in the years to come.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.