Reviewer's report

Title: The impact of the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) on the recording of smoking targets in primary care medical records: Cross-sectional analyses from The Health Improvement Network (THIN) database

Version: 2 Date: 9 March 2012

Reviewer: Philip Hannaford

Reviewer's report:

This is a well written study of change in the recording of smoking status and advice about smoking cessation, before and after the introduction of an incentivised contract for quality care in general practice in the UK. The paper is well written. It uses a large database of high quality clinical data. It uses appropriate analytical techniques and the data have been interpreted cautiously. The strengths and limitations of the paper are described well, including the cross-sectional nature of the work which inevitably limits any causal interpretation of the results. The paper is one of a rapidly growing number of studies looking at the possible effects of the new GP contract. The results are likely to be of some interest to readers, although I suspect many practitioners will not be surprised by them (there is other good evidence to show that GPs are often very adept at meeting performance targets set them).

There a couple of minor essential revisions:

1. In the methods section it is stated that patients were identified on the 1st April of each year examined, and excluded if they had not been registered on the previous 3 months as this corresponded to the grace period GPs have to update the records of new patients. The authors should confirm that this is because GPs are required to ascertain the smoking status of all new patients upon registration. If this isn’t the case then the authors should have excluded anyone who had not been registered for at least 27 months before the index date (otherwise lack of smoking status might reflect reduced opportunity to ascertain smoking status rather than poor performance).

2. Table 2 is complex, aggravated by the inclusion of various %s - total %, recording of smoking% and advice %. There are several ways in which the table might be made clearer- e.g. replace the % total with actual numbers (may raise formatting challenges but is probably the preferred option as it highlights the size of each group examined), or through the use of shading of columns rather than rows, with the shading of record% and advice% columns.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable
**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
no competing interests