Reviewer's report

Title: Trends in procedures for infertility and caesarean sections: was NICE disinvestment guidance implemented?

Version: 2  Date: 31 December 2012

Reviewer: David Cromwell

Reviewer's report:

The revisions to the article have adequately dealt with my original comments. The methods are clearer and the discussion highlights the main limitations of the analysis. I have only minor comments on the text.

Pg 3, first para of methods. I assume the HES data being used were requested from the NHS Information Centre and were provided as aggregate tables rather than being provided as patient-level records. It would be helpful to clarify the type of data obtained.

Pg 4, para 1. It is awkward to list all OPCS codes for deliveries. The shorthand “R18 to R25” would be sufficient to allow someone to repeat the analysis.

In several places, the text refers to “any diagnosis code”. A typical reader could interpret this to mean any ICD-10 code rather than a code being entered in any of the HES diagnosis fields. Please find a phrase to distinguish between primary diagnosis and all diagnosis fields and use it consistently. For example, on page 7, first line “where infertility was used in any diagnosis code” could be rephrased as “where infertility was coded as either a primary or secondary diagnosis.”

The first line of the discussion is confusing with the word “evidence” being used in two places. It would be more accurate to write “The observed changes in the procedure rates over time were not consistent with the decline in rates that would be expected if English NHS trusts had responded to the NICE “do not do” guidance.”

The article would be better if (1) it was clear that the data applied only to English NHS acute trusts (the article does not state this clearly and refers to England and Wales in the conclusion), and (2) it referred to “NHS trusts” rather than “trusts” or “hospital trusts”.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests