Reviewer's report

Title: Development and evaluation of a hand held computer based on-call pack for health protection out of hours duty: A pilot study

Version: 1 Date: 25 January 2005

Reviewer: Mary Peterson

Reviewer’s report:

General

While this is a small-scale study it's an innovative way of transferring a paper-based system to a portable electronic one.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

All the sources used in the study (p.7) should be cited with website addresses. It would be useful to know if there was a formal process of analysis or evaluation of the additional information resources mentioned on p.7 before they were included. Were there any licensing or copyright issues in creating multiple copies of these resources?

One major weakness of the project is the "ad-hoc basis" (p.7) by which the information packs are updated. If such a system were to be put into general use for a first tier response, it should be assumed that the resources used were the current versions. Acknowledgement that this is necessary is made on p.12, but there should be a comment that the ad-hoc updating wasn't satisfactory on p.7 to make it quite clear.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

More information on the process of creating the pack would be useful if the project were to be replicated. For example, the choice of software used was mainly for ease of adaptation. However, the process of adaptation might be useful for those who have not worked with PDAs before. No comment was made as to the difference between PDAs and laptops apart from the screen size.

The way in which the electronic version was used could be shown in more detail. For example, the description on p.6 of the index page seems to imply that the view of the electronic version was substantially different from the printed version. It would be useful to take an example and drill down from the index at least one more screen.

The plural of PDA is PDAs not PDA's (which is possessive.) Correct on page 4, but one escaped on p.8.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

The Discussion section (pp. 10-13) concentrates on the use of PDAs. It would be interesting to learn whether the users preferred the PDAs to the laptops, or to have some comment from the authors as to the suitability of both types of device for the task, comparing their strengths and weaknesses.
What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.