Reviewer’s report

Title: Are alcoholism treatments effective? The Project MATCH data

Version: 4 Date: 11 May 2005

Reviewer: Tom Delbanco

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General
I have carefully reviewed the back and forth between the authors and their severest critic and note that the interchange summarizes much of the history of research into the management of alcohol abuse...passion flames quickly, particularly at any suggestion that a given therapy may not work.

I find the paper by Cutles and Fishbain thoughtful, carefully done, and helpful in the way it points to counterintuitive findings and reminds the reader once again of the incredible importance of both selection bias and patient expectations.

I think it should be published.

However, it would benefit from a relatively minor revision. The Discussion is much too long, repetitive, and almost "protests too much.." The salient findings detailed (once again) on pages 17-18 can be summarized succinctly in the opening paragraph of the Discussion. The implications of the findings and the limitations of the study can then be outlined. Finally, the authors can point briefly to their view of where to go next in this long struggle.

The passion of the refutation by Dr Miller is considerable. He clearly has an important role in the field and a lot to say! I suggest that he be invited to write a short "counterpoint," in which he can quarrel publicly with the authors. Finally, it would be good to get a fairly uninvolved, but expert spectator to write an accompanying editorial.

This is actually an important paper. To air such alternative views of an expensive, and much-referenced data base, would be a real service to academics engaged in the management of patients with drinking problems.

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