Reviewer's report

Title: Socio-demographic and clinical characteristics of re-presentation to an Australian inner-city emergency department: implications for service delivery.

Version: 2 Date: 7 May 2007

Reviewer: Jochanan Benbassat

Reviewer's report:

General

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

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Reviewer's report for the authors

This paper attempts to identify the characteristics of patients who re-present to the emergency department within 28 days of having been discharged from this department in an Australian hospital in a retrospective cohort that was selected over a 24-month period. The independent determinants of re-presentation (homelessness, receiving a government pension, having left part-way through treatment, discharge to a residential-care facility) were identified using logistic regression. The authors have obviously invested a thorough effort in this study. However, it would appear to me that its methods, results and conclusions may be more lucidly reported.

Major Comments

1. The authors should be explicit about the contribution of their study to what is already known. The second paragraph of the "background" section is a well written summary of the pertinent literature. It includes the characteristics of frequent users of hospital emergency departments. However, the content of this second paragraph is inconsistent with the statement in the fourth paragraph that "little information is available to identify risk factor for ED re-presentation". What I miss from the last paragraph of the "background" section is a convincing justification of this study and what it was expected to add to the already existing information in the literature on this subject.

2. The manuscript does not adhere to the standards for reporting of the methods. The authors may wish to rewrite the methods section by organizing it into the subsections of setting, patient population (inclusion and exclusion criteria), independent and dependent variables, procedure and data analysis. I believe that the authors should specify and justify the independent variables that are listed in Tables 3 and 5. Is "homelessness" routinely recorded in the emergency department data base?

3. I'd strongly recommend to the authors to consult an experienced writer. The length of the paper could have been reduced by more than half without loss of content. For example, it would appear to me that the authors should consider either deleting or justifying the third paragraph of the background section, the section beginning with "In examining ...." of the fourth paragraph of the background section, the analogy between hospital readmissions and repeated presentation to the emergency department, the section beginning with "An alternative measure...." of the first paragraph of the "Study design" section, and making other numerous extensive revisions for the purpose of reducing the paper's length.

4. I am sensibly modest about my knowledge on statistics, and obviously, the authors had expert statistical advice. Still, even though I am familiar with logistic regressions, I had difficulties in understanding Tables 3 and 5. It would appear to me that Table 3 may be presented in more conventional terms, and Table 5 may
be deleted and its content presented in one sentence in the results.

Minor Revisions

1. I felt uncomfortable with the term "re-presentation". The authors may wish to consider alternative terms such as "repeated presentations"

2. The authors may wish to consider defining the term "government pension". Who is eligible for a government pension in Australia? In what way is it different from pension from other sources? Above what age is one entitled to a government pension?

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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

Declaration of competing interests: I declare that I have no competing interests' below.