Reviewer's report

Title: Read coding patients with learning disabilities: Lessons from a cohort study

Version: 1 Date: 13 March 2008

Reviewer: Owen Barr

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

No, I do not feel they have been clear about the definitions to be used and a number of conditions I identified in Table 1, are not always associated with learning disabilities, including Autism, Fragile X and Phenylketonuria.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

It appears so, although I am very surprised to see that the term mental retardation is used officially within the UK.

3. Are the data sound?

Given the points raised in response to Q1 above I do not accept that the data is sound.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Appears to in my understanding of what is required, although this is not my specialist area.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

I feel the discussion is limited and there is limited support from the literature in a number of areas of the paper, including the introduction and the conclusions. There is a considerable body of literature about access to primary care for people with learning disabilities and this is not integrated into this paper.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

No

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

See respond to Q5. I feel this paper lacks relevance to the necessary literature in this area, of which there is a considerable body.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
Yes

9. Is the writing acceptable?

In relation to presentational aspects it is acceptable. However, this paper lacks the depth of the reference to and support from the literature I would have expected to see in a paper of this nature.

Please make your review as constructive and detailed as possible in your comments so that authors have the opportunity to overcome any serious deficiencies that you find and please also divide your comments into the following categories:

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

I feel this paper needs to be grounded in the related literature and requires major revision. I also feel an explanation of why some terms not always linked to learning disability were used needs to be given and major limitations of this decision discussed within the paper.

What next?: Reject because scientifically unsound

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:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'