Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 31 March 2008

Reviewer: Linda Allan

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions
Title not reflective of cohort - women only

Background:

Line one: Requires rewording - conflict does not exist over what a learning disability is - rather the conflict exists due to lack of agreement on definition.

Line Three: Dispute that many parts of the world utilise 'mental retardation' - if this is the case - requires further referencing - international term is 'intellectual disability'.

Para 2 - last line: If Crawford et al's phrase was utilised today most people with a ID would consider this highly offensive - explanation required of what is acceptable to people with a LD

Para 3 - not clear of the value of this - is the author attempting to distinguish between learning disability & learning difficulty - if so would suggest rewording

Para 4 - Reference outdated - would suggest utilising more recent reference - plethora available

Para 6 - confusion of term - line 2 - learning difficulty / line 4 - learning disability

Para 8 - There are many more advantages of Read code use

Methods

No explanation given as to why the authors only included women within the age range of 25-64 (is this paper linked to a paper on cervical screening???)Population not given. Definition of Learning disability may be better moved to 'background'. No statistical analysis / power given. No mention of study design / process / consent process or ethical approval. No rationale of why these read codes were selected and not others e.g. up to 40% of population will have epilepsy - why not search on this code or utilise some of the many other common genetic codes?

Discussion

Highly dispute that this paper explores whether the DoH target of whether people with Learning disabilities registered with general practice have been read coded - this is a sample of 290 women only and makes no reference as to pattern of coding in men (more men will have a learning disability than women)
The strengths and limitations of the study requires rewriting - no mention of the sample being only women. No mention of impact of only utilising a few read codes for example

Existing literature
Reference quoted was work carried out prior to the new GP contract - the authors should acknowledge this and impact the contract will have had.

Conclusions are weak

PLEASE NOTE _ THERE ARE NO STATISTICAL ANALYSES WITHIN THIS PAPER - I HAVE HAD TO TICK THE BOX 'Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.' BELOW TO ALLOW FOR ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION - THERE REQUIRES TO BE STATISTICAL CALCULATIONS WITHIN THIS PAPER - OR THE TITLE CHANGED TO A DESCRIPTIVE PAPER

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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'