Reviewer's report

Title: Ethnic differences in Internal Medicine referrals and diagnosis in the Netherlands

Version: 3 Date: 26 April 2008

Reviewer: Allan Krasnik

Reviewer's report:

1. The research questions: The questions stated are (as previously indicated) relevant and clear - and the background is further elaborated by including general considerations regarding ethnic differences in not only health status, but also in the expressions of symptoms and attitudes towards health care.

2. The structural features of the national and local health care is now better explained in the first parts of the manuscript and the motivation and consequences of the inclusion of referral area and municipality is evident. The general presentation of minority groups in The Netherlands does still not take account of first versus second generation immigrants - which might play a role when studying factors influencing access and utilization of health services. In fact, this issue is even discussed in the discussion section of the manuscript in the light of the results.

The text now includes inclusion criteria step by step, however I still believe that a figure illustrating the different selection steps and the related numbers (inclusions and excusions) would be helpful.

3. The data sources regarding ethnicity and socio-demographic status are now better explained and discussed. If I understand it correctly, the ethnicity of the general population is based on general municipal register data on country of birth whereas the patient data regarding country of birth are self-reported. This use of different data sources might in principle imply a risk of information bias (however perhaps not very significant). A comment in the discussion section related to the use of different data sources in the study could be valuable.

4. The tables are now self-explanatory.

5. The discussion section no longer includes new results - and the consequences regarding daily medical practice are (however very brifly) outlined. I do accept that the present study is mainly providing very general evidence which is only to a limited extent able to guide new practices (but rather a basis for defining further research questions).

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.