Reviewer’s report

Title: Significant differences in the use of healthcare resources of native-born and foreign-born in Spain.

Version: 3  Date: 15 March 2009

Reviewer: Andrea Buron

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions
None

Minor Essential Revisions
I appreciate all the changes made onto the manuscript by the authors. Reading the manuscript and the comments made by the authors, I have only some comments left:

1. In the introduction, as well as in the discussion section, to the paragraph “The Spanish National Health System attends both legal and illegal immigrants. Theoretically a valid identity documents (healthcare card) is necessary to be attended yet the truth is that immigrants who lack this document and remain in the country as illegal aliens are also attended by the health system. It is important to note that in order to receive the healthcare card the only requisite is a registration certificate from the municipal register.” I would add 2 important facts that I believe are not sufficiently stated:

• that in order to register in the municipal register there is theoretically no need to be legal, people only need to show an ID but not a residence permit;
• and that in absence of a healthcare card, the only healthcare service that attends people are the EDs, primary care access is restricted in most cases to people with healthcare card.

2. As I suggested in my previous review, it would be helpful to have a table contrasting the survey data with register data from official sources (municipal register), not with data from another survey (which may have his own but similar limitations). Perhaps a third column could be added with this data in table 1.

3. Regarding the inclusion of some EU countries in the same package as Spain, I see the comment, but Poland is not mentioned and it is important since its inclusion in the EU is prior to the time period of the study and therefore directly affects a possible misclassification (Bulgaria and Romania, as the authors state, were not included and therefore is not so relevant to mention them).

4. After stating the overrepresentation of the Latin America population in the survey, authors should be able to hypothesize about the direction of the possible bias in the ED utilization, lifestyles and other important outcome variables of the
study. This refers to the sentence “The fact that the questionnaire was written in Spanish makes it easier for the Latin American population, as well as for immigrants who have been in Spain for a long time, to answer the questions. Therefore, over representation of the Latin American population is likely to occur.”

5. As to the tables 3, 4 and 5, I would suggest to eliminate the variable value “yes” where possible because it is obvious and therefore unnecessary.

6. The statement “actually 15.1% of children born in Spain have foreign mothers” in page 10 deserves a reference, as does the sentence “We can explain this circumstance if we bear in mind that the immigrant population, coming mainly from European Union countries, tends to be made up of people who are establishing their final residence in our country.”

Discretionary Revisions

7. Some minor aspects detected:

• page 10, “Data on hospitalization of immigrants in Spain is still scarce. Studies carried out in our country by Sanz et al [24] or the study by Cots et al. based on hospital discharges; conclude that consumption of hospital stays” a comma rather than a semicolon should be used after “discharges”; alternatively the following way could be clearer “Data on hospitalization of immigrants in Spain is still scarce. Studies carried out in our country and based on hospital discharges, like the one by Sanz et al [24] or the study by Cots et al., conclude that consumption of hospital stays”. Also the study by Cots et al. deserves a reference as well.

• page 10, “Finally, in regard to preventative measures, in a recent review”, better “preventive” in order to be coherent with the rest of the text;

• page 11, “Other limitation is the inclusion of the new countries recently incorporated to European Union…” is not Other but Another.

• Page 11, “That future investigation will need to consider the differences in health care utilization and health characteristics between member states that may influence demands for service. But in the 2006 survey the proportion of migrants from the EU, Canada and the USA was very small and in a preliminary analysis (age adjusted) we found a similar health profile and use of health services to the indigenous population so we decided to analyze the as a single group.” I believe the first “That” is not necessary; and that at the end of the paragraph authors wanted to say “them” instead of “the”.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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