Author's response to reviews

Title: Low validity of self-report in identifying recent mental health diagnosis among U.S. service members completing Pre-Deployment Health Assessment (PreDHA) and deployed to Afghanistan, 2007: A retrospective cohort study.

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Author's response to reviews:

Melissa Norton
Editor-in-Chief
BMC Public Health

Dear Dr. Norton,

I am in receipt of your correspondence dated April 22, 2009, requesting modifications to manuscript 7200930162964107, entitled “Low validity of self-report in identifying recent mental health diagnosis among U.S. service members completing Pre-Deployment Health Assessment (PreDHA) and deployed to Afghanistan, 2007: A retrospective cohort study”.

Specifically, you have requested clarification of the ethical status of this analysis. As public health non-research, this work was specifically exempt from United States regulatory requirements for Institutional Review Board review. The routine analysis of public health data for the purposes of evaluating program and policy effectiveness is considered public health practice. The application of public health practice within the United States Department of Defense (DoD) is referred to as “force health protection”. The Defense Medical Surveillance System (DMSS), described in the manuscript, exists specifically by Department of Defense Directives (DoDD) to facilitate “force health protection”.

Many similar analyses, performed without specific IRB review, can be found among the peer-reviewed publications of the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center (please see http://www.afhsc.mil/bibliography.asp for further examples).

In response to your request, a new paragraph (entitled “Ethical Considerations”) has been added to the end of the “Methods” section describing these considerations. Additionally, new acronyms introduced in this paragraph have been added to the “List of Abbreviations” section.

Sincerely,

Dr. Remington Nevin