Reviewer’s report

Title: Enhancing the Quality of International Orthopedic Medical Mission Trips Using The Blue Distinction Criteria for Knee and Hip Replacement Centers

Version: 1 Date: 4 April 2013

Reviewer: Megan Bohensky

Reviewer’s report:

This well-written paper highlighted the evaluation of a joint replacement mission service operating in the Dominican Republic. With a growing burden of arthritis in developing countries, TJRs are likely to become more common. Processes for ensuring the quality of these services would be very valuable. This paper has applied a US standard (the Blue Cross/Shield Blue Distinction criteria) and discusses how the program performed against each of the criteria. Overall, I think this topic is very interesting. The authors describe methods by which they evaluated the barriers to adopting the criteria, but I did not think they were clearly presented in the results (apart from brief descriptions in the Tables). If other developing nations are seeking to use these criteria or develop their own, I think a more in depth discussion of some of the barriers and common emerging themes would be quite useful.

Discretionary Revisions

Methods, Setting

1. Just by way of background, it would be helpful to know if there are other centers performing TJR in DR (i.e. are TJRs only performed when visiting clinicians come to DR?) If not, what proportion are performed when there are visiting clinicians?

Major essential revisions

Abstract, Results

2. The results describe the criterion categories which were met and not met. It would be useful to describe some of the actual criteria where the program didn’t meet the requirements. I realise space does not permit the listing of all of these, but some examples might be useful for readers to understand what an “informational” criteria is, for instance.

Methods, Analysis

3. Who scored the program criteria? Was the reliability of this scoring assessed in any way? If the scoring was not assessed for reliability, this should be mentioned in a limitations section.

4. The last sentence of this paragraph states, “We also asked team members if there are barriers…” Were formal interviews or surveys conducted? Was a wide range of team members targeted to obtain a representative view?
Results section

5. Can you please present some of the information that was collected on the barriers in the results section? Are there common themes that have emerged within these, such as resourcing issues or medical cultural? Are there plans to address any of these?

Discussion section, paragraph 3

6. The authors mention that initiating a patient navigation program and evaluating patients’ discharge needs are two areas where the program lost points and these areas have been highlighted for improvement. I would like to see more of a discussion of the barriers that were identified in addressing these issues- e.g. is there a lack of resourcing to be able to provide many of these services? Should the Blue Distinction criteria then be modified for health services in developing country settings or should these issues ultimately be addressed?

7. Could the authors please discuss whether there are criteria which will be addressed as a result of this project? For example, using shared decision making could be implemented at a relatively low cost, but it seems that there are cultural barriers. Can these be changed within this context? Or where cost is a barrier, is it possible to attract resourcing to address the issues?

Table 1

8. The criterion entitled “If facility does not report to Leapfrog, facility participates in other initiatives that encourage the sharing of best practices, incorporates data feedback for objective analysis, and promotes collaborative improvement” scored 0 points but it says that the criterion has been met. If this is an optional/unscored criteria, this should be specified for clarity.

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