Reviewer's report

Title: The impact of ICU format change on the outcome of high risk surgical patients: a cohort analysis

Version: 3 Date: 1 June 2011

Reviewer: Judith Jacobi

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined? Yes
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? Yes
3. Are the data sound? YES
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? YES
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? YES- significantly improved in this draft
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? YES
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? YES
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? Could incorporate the word closed and open. E.g. The Impact of closed vs. open format ICU admission practices on surgical patient outcome
9. Is the writing acceptable? YES

- Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)
  - Consider adding results on where mortality occurred- in the ICU vs. in-hospital (not ICU)
  - Consider clarifying whether there has been a change in palliative or hospice practices. Many of our patients now die in a hospice setting and in the US, that is typically a hospital discharge destination.
- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
  - Page 8, line 1: correctly states there are advances in ICU care- however products such as new antimicrobials, antifungals, improved glycemic control, transfusion practices, etc all have the potential to impact patient outcome. This is an important deficiency in before-after data.
- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

==Please clarify the statement on page 4 "Medical records of all eligible patients were reviewed" relative to the Research Review Board exemption for data that could not be reduced to individual patients )as stated on page 5). If the medical record included the patient chart, that would violate the ethical regulation.

==Were the medical record reviewers blinded to the time period of patient care or the patient outcome?

==Were the medical record reviewers also one of the care-givers in the ICU"

==APACHE II predicts a higher mortality than actually occurs in contemporary ICU care. If the predicted mortality is too high in the closed format group, wouldn't that bias the results in favor of that outcome?

**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.