Reviewer's report

Title: Whether to report diabetes as the underlying cause-of-death? a survey of internists of different sub-specialties

Version: 1 Date: 11 January 2010

Reviewer: Chalapati Rao

Reviewer's report:

The authors have carefully analysed their data and have derived meaningful conclusions regarding the intent and preference for certification of diabetes as the underlying cause of death by different groups of medical specialists. I offer the following suggestions:

Minor essential revisions.

1. The survey response rates were only about 25%. The authors should state the range of response rates (and range in number of respondents) from the other three studies, to give the readers an indication of how much higher were the response rates from this study.

2. The authors should include in the discussion some specific recommendations to standardise certification practices between different specialists for deaths among diabetic patients, in terms of ensuring that diabetes is listed somewhere on the certificate, either in Part I or Part II.

Discretionary revisions.

1. They could possibly add a statement to justify their conclusions despite the low response rates, in that the findings closely matched their original hypothesis about the hierarchy in the percentages of case scenarios for which diabetes is reported as the underlying cause.

2. Also, this study indicates that due to these certifier preferences, underlying cause statistics are not entirely reliable. Therefore, in addition to standardising certification practices, the authors could also advocate more research using multiple causes of death, which include analyses that use information from Part II of the death certificate.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a
statistician.