Reviewer's report

Title: What is the extent of potentially avoidable admissions amongst hospital inpatients with palliative care needs?

Version: 1 Date: 22 November 2012

Reviewer: Diane Allan

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

Minor essential revisions:
• Delete the first part of the first sentence of the background section. As it reads, discussing the other countries raises more questions for me (and the answers are not provided). For example, how does the UK compare with the countries listed? Don’t think it is necessary.
• Provide a reference for the last statement of the first paragraph in the background section.
• Third paragraph of background section, first sentence. My guess is that you are referring to the UK here. Please clarify.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

Discretionary revisions:
• Provide a percent for non-English speaking patients (in brackets) just to give a sense of the size of this group.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

Minor essential revisions:
• First paragraph of results. What did you do with the patients that had incomplete case data? How might the deletion of these influence the findings?
• I cannot comment on Figure 1 as it is too small to read.
• First sentence of ‘appropriateness of admissions’ section. Please reword to reflect that these are palliative care need patients (not all patients admitted to the hospital).
• Second paragraph of ‘appropriateness of admissions’ section. Please provide a footnote for Accident & Emergency. Not being from the UK, I am not sure what this means. Is it the same as what might be called an Emergency Department?

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
Minor essential revisions:

• Table 1. Percents do not add to 100. Please make note of why or add another category (e.g., other).
• The figures are numbered incorrectly in the text so this needs to be fixed.
• There is a bracket missing in Table 6.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

Minor essential revisions:

• Please revise the first paragraph of the discussion section. I find the writing very choppy. In addition, it is hard to determine whether the figures that are provided refer to the 208 inpatients for the 6.7% who had potentially avoidable admissions.
• Do not understand the second half of the last sentence in the fourth paragraph (discussion section). In other words, how does the community supports relate to the statement about the percent of cancer diagnoses?
• Need to discuss the findings from the King’s Fund Report (last paragraph of discussion) in relation to palliative care. Would the interventions also work for those with palliative needs? At the very least you could say that you have no reason to believe that this (decrease in inpatient admissions) wouldn’t be true for those with palliative needs as well.
• Last sentence of the paper. Please revise to read ‘preferences of patients themselves and their families.’
• The one thing that I would like to see either discussed more fully or at least noted as something for further study is the differences between those who were identified as having an avoidable admission versus those whose admissions were deemed appropriate. Statistical comparisons of these 2 groups could certainly shed light on the reasons for inappropriate admissions and future interventions/policies to decrease inappropriate admissions.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

Major essential revisions:

• The limitations of the paper have not been discussed at all. Certainly there are some that should be highlighted. Two limitations that stand out for me are: (1) the patients deleted from the analysis due to incomplete case data and how this may or may not influence the findings; and (2) the lack of information on patient/family member preference for admission. The latter could have a major influence on one’s reason for admission.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

Minor essential revisions:

• Ouslander et al have done a fair amount of work (USA) on avoidable
hospitalizations and nursing home residents. Similarly, Menec et al have looked at the issue in Canada. Given that 50% of those identified with an unavoidable hospitalization in this study lived in a nursing home, this research is likely pertinent and should be incorporated.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Minor essential revisions:
• Background section of abstract. They suggest that no studies have attempted to identify the proportion of unavoidable hospital admissions. This should be re-worded to say palliative hospital admissions. I am aware of a number of studies that have examined avoidable hospital admissions.

9. Is the writing acceptable?

Minor essential revisions:
• The word ‘data’ is plural. Please make sure that this is reflected throughout the paper.

Minor issues not for publication
• Last sentence of results section in abstract. Make into 2 sentences with last sentence being something like, ‘Furthermore, the Palliative Medicine Consultants suggested that these individuals could have received care in this setting.’
• First paragraph of methods section. Typo in the 6th sentence. Spend should be spent.
• Second last sentence of methods section has a typo. Agreements should not be plural.
• Third paragraph of results. The acronym for GSF has been presented earlier so acronym can be used here. Also, the last sentence should read ‘a median age’ not ‘the median age.’
• Last sentence of the results section is a bit awkward. Perhaps the end could be worded to something like, ‘however, when applying a standard definition [1], only around half were identified as having palliative care needs.’

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.