Reviewer’s report

Title: The practice of defensive medicine among hospital doctors in the United Kingdom

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Reviewer: Elad Asher

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Dr. Osman Ortashi et al. were seeking to assess the prevalence of the practice of defensive medicine in the UK among hospital doctors and factors affecting it. They designed a survey and defensive medicine practice was assessed and tested against four factors age, gender, specialty and grade.

Overall this is a study on an important topic (defensive medicine) and reports novel findings (prevalence and factors affecting defensive medicine in UK). The methods of survey development and sampling are satisfactory. The response rate is satisfactory. The paper is generally well written but the discussion should be more focused. Below are suggestions by section:

Background:
1. There is no definition of “negative” and “positive” defensive medicine, no mention of unconscious defensive medicine, and why it is hard to measure defensive medicine, which is very important for this article.
2. A small paragraph should focus on what is known about the prevalence and factors affecting defensive medicine in the world (or at least U.S vs. Europe) and then state what is known about UK defensive practices, even if the knowledge is limited.
3. The reader would benefit if the authors could provide him with information regarding the UK health care system.

Methods:
Overall the methods are sound - the survey was developed in a rigorous manner and was tested on 10 physicians. The sampling method is reasonable and the response rate is acceptable. The analysis needs to be reworked.
1. It is unclear what were the outcomes and predictors in the models. The authors need to think carefully about what predictors are and what outcomes are. A conceptual model would help.
2. A section on the variables in the study (i.e. predictors and outcomes) would be very helpful. (Some of the survey responses might be predictors. For example, a lawsuit could be a predictor for defensive practices).
3. It is not defined how “enquired about awareness and personal use of different aspects of defensive medical practice” has been operationalized.
4. It is not clear what the 17 questions were, and adding the questionnaire to the
supplement material of this article would probably help to clarify that.

5. The authors mentioned that the 3 hospitals were chosen on the basis of convenience sampling. A short paragraph could help describe those hospitals. Are they tertiary? How many beds are there in each one and where were they located in the UK and why was it convenient to conduct the survey there.

6. Page 5: NHS - I’m assuming the authors meant “National Health Service”… This should be corrected.

Results:

1. Page 7: “The majority of participants, 89% (n = 182) were aware of the concept of defensive medical practice”. What does it mean were aware??

2. Page 7: “14% (n = 29) had a direct experience of litigation” Again, does it means that 14% were sued in the past? What does it mean “had direct experience”?

3. Page 7: “Those who are more than 40 years old and those who are in consultant jobs reported practicing significantly less defensive medicine than others (P –value 0.001 and < 0.0001 respectively)” Please provide numbers and % in the text.

4. Page 8: “Nine percent would refuse to treat high risk patients” This is a very interesting finding. Was it a direct question? or a finding that the physicians shared with the authors during the survey. Can you please elaborate on this very interesting finding.

5. There are many findings that the reader needs to “digest”, maybe a figure or two would help with that.

Discussion:

1. The discussion is too long and not focused (what is the “take home message” that the authors would like to give to the readers?).

2. Moreover, there is lack of comparison with other countries (especially in Europe).

3. Page 9: If “one in three consultants in this study had a direct experience with litigation” how come they are associated with less defensive medicine practice?

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