Reviewer's report

Title: Risk assessment and decision making about in labour transfer from rural maternity care: a social judgement and signal detection analysis

Version: 1 Date: 8 March 2012

Reviewer: Carl Thompson

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No major revisions.
Minor revisions: a couple of sentences needed on the method of random selection for the midwives. Also the obsetricians weren't so much 'purposively' selected (if they were, then details of sampling criteria required), so much as convenience sampled - there were only 17 consultant units in whole country if I read the paper correctly.

Discretionary revisions: the only one I would recommend was a paragraph or two on the evidence (specifically, positive predictive value) or lack of it for the factors that SHOULD influence the decisions. Are there objective/clinical predictors of outcome. Uniting the prescriptive and descriptive elements of decision making theory would be extremely valuable for those trying to improve the quality of judgement and decisions. The discursive point made about guidelines not improving quality of judgements when clinicians do not disagree is somewhat predicated on the guidelines being the result of professional consensus and so the point is well made. However, it strikes me that where guidelines reflect solid trial evidence that (regardless of professional opinion) a particular clinical feature SHOULD result in transfer then the ultimate improvement strategy is to influence behaviour such that more people override their (perhaps flawed) instincts and follow the guideline. A few sentences alluding to the presence or absence of such indicators would be worthwhile.

Overall though a pleasure to read, concise, well written, clear and nicely structured.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I have previously undertaken research and written papers with Len Dalgleish.