Reviewer's report

Title: Healthcare Provider Attitudes Towards the Problem List in an Electronic Health Record: A Mixed-Methods Qualitative Study

Version: 1 Date: 17 April 2012

Reviewer: Bill L Galanter

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Major Compulsory Revisions

#1) The sample was a convenience sample from a prior study on problem lists. In addition, the response was somewhat low without any mention of PCP's vs. specialists responses. This process produces a sample that may be highly non-representative. To remedy this partially, more information about the convenience sample as well as differential response rates based on important clinician factors studied should be shown, i.e. Discipline, Role, Training status etc... As an example, I would like to know if the response rate was very different for PCP's than specialists for instance. This should be added to the response rate section of the Results as well as an explanation in the "Demographics of Respondents."

Another odd unexplained part of the convenience sample was that in the survey, PCP's were 9:1 over specialists, but in the interview 1:4. It must have been deliberate, why was this done?

All these convenience sample issues should be listed in the limitations section.

#2) The survey instructions seem to be based on a model of a PCP driven problem list. The instructions ask the PCP what the PCP should do and asks the specialist what the PCP should do? This excludes the notion of the problem list being updated by a specialist which is a part of meaningful use and the Joint Commission standards. I am not sure why these instructions were given in this manner. In addition, these instructions were not consistent with the vignette's. Some of the vignette's asked about a specialist adding a problem, which makes no sense in the context of "answer each question based on what you would want a PCP to do in order to create a problem list." If I was a specialist, I would find these instructions contradictory to some of the vignette's. This issue needs to be explained further as clearly it is too late to change the instructions.

#3) In deciding which question had a majority of yes or no, 75% is somewhat arbitrary. Using a statistical test of the distribution being different than random (50%yes/50%no) seems less arbitrary. Based on this criteria, question #3 shows a majority answered yes (P=.001), as does question #6 (P<0.05), but these are listed as non-majority due to the a priori 75% cutoff. I think that a statistical test of yes or no being greater than by chance, or 1 SD or 2 SD is better than an arbitrary 75%.
I do not think that this arbitrariness is trivial as the number of contentious questions goes up or down based on an arbitrary definition of "majority". The discussion of Analysis of Majority Measures is based on this arbitrary decision as is table 7 with its statistical analysis and a significant amount of the discussion.

Minor Essential Revisions

#1) Table 3 is very confusing. It appears that "Role" has something to do with "Problem list Importance" as they are next to each other. There should be some type of thick line between the issues on the left and right to show that they are not related.

#2) Introduction, Paragraph #1: "The problem list is a key part of the medical record that is used by clinicians in nearly every patient appointment" I don't personally think that this is true, but I do not think that it should be stated without a reference.

Discretionary Revisions

#1) "non-transitive diseases" Would just use chronic diseases or chronic diagnoses

#2) Background, Paragraph #4: "Unfortunately, as discussed below, the medical", "as discussed below", is not necessary.

#3) Survey Instrument, Paragraph #1: "highly debatable across practitioners" Would use variable instead of debatable

#4) Validation, Paragraph #1: "medical" should be medically.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests