Reviewer's report

Title: Use of email for patient communication in student health care: a cross-sectional study

Version: Date: 2 September 2004

Reviewer: Jan De Maeseneer

Reviewer's report:

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

The question is not new, but it is well defined, and it adds some new perspectives to the existing knowledge.

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

Yes, although one could argue that a daily retrospection on the possibilities for the replacement of consultations and telephones by email, is less appropriate than a continuous assessment (consultation per consultation; telephone call per telephone call) whether or not a replacement could be feasible, would probably provide more accurate information. In the methodology that is used here the doctor gives a general assessment for all the encounters of that day.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

Yes, with a high percentage of cooperation.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Yes, all the data are adequately reported.

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

Yes.

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

Yes.

7. Is the writing acceptable?

Yes, some improvements of the English are needed.

It would be worthwhile to add in the discussion the patient’s perspective, reflecting on the fact that introduction of email may cause a "digital divide" and contribute to inequalities in health for those who have no access or are computer illiterate.

Discretionary Revisions: critical reflection on the methodology (see higher) and adding the patient’s perspective to the discussion.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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

Declaration of competing interests:

None