Reviewer's report

Title: Using Informatics Tools to Assess the Care and Outcomes of Patients with Respiratory Tract Infections Visiting a Rural Kenyan Health Centre

Version: 1 Date: 19 January 2006

Reviewer: Stephen Lapinsky

Reviewer's report:

General
This is an interesting paper describing the use of an electronic patient record supported by a mobile PDA system for research/clinical data collection in a rural Kenyan health center. This paper adds to the literature on the role of mobile computing in clinical medicine. The precise research question is not clear, ie. whether this relates to the implementation of a mobile data collection system or the question of outcomes of patients with acute respiratory illness. The conclusion suggests the former question, in which case Tables 1 and 2 are less relevant, although they do demonstrate the value of the data collected. More information on the handheld implementation would be interesting (as outlined below).

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

ABSTRACT - Results: I believe the dates should be "August 2002 and January 2005" according to the body of the text

RESULTS - Subject Enrollment: ".were due to acute respiratory tract infection" should be ". were due to upper respiratory tract infection"

DISCUSSION: p11 - the last paragraph repeats information given previously.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Although the methodology for the study is described in great detail, little information is provided on the implementation and management over the 2.5 year period. Questions which may be of interest include:
- how many handheld devices were used?
- how many research assistants were trained to use the Palm?
- was hardware/battery/software failure encountered? Were data ever lost?
- was any resistance encountered to the use of the handheld?

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: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests