Reviewer's report

Title: The effect of attitude to risk on decisions made by nurses using computerised decision support software in telephone clinical assessment: an observational study

Version: 1 Date: 19 August 2007

Reviewer: Steve George

Reviewer's report:

General

This is a well written paper from an established team of researchers in this field. It addresses an important issue: whether attitude to risk affects decisions made in clinical telephone assessment. The study is a well designed survey of nurses undertaking clinical telephone assessment and the response rate, although not up to the 80% recommended by Streiner and Norman, is in keeping with average response rates in our junk-mail infested age. Analysis of data is well conducted and outputs are clear. It is not until we get the to results that any problems occur. Here, however, interpretation becomes difficult. The underlying hypothesis of the study is that more risk averse nurses will assign fewer people to self care. Attitude to risk is measured using an instrument based upon one developed for measuring attitude to risk amongst general medical practitioners in the Netherlands in 1990. In that study a clear trend was noted between attitude and decision making. That trend is not demonstrated so clearly here. Smooth trends across five categories of attitude occur in only three of the fifteen items contained within the instrument and some odds ratios are in the direction opposite to that expected. However, there some clear lessons from this paper. Nurses from a hospital background were more likely to send patients to self care than those from a community background, and length of experience is clearly important. The findings are well discussed and the authors acknowledge the limitations of the paper and he difficulty of drawing firm conclusions.

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

There are no obvious errors requiring re-writing and I recommend publication as it is.

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

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept without revision

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:

No competing interests.