Reviewer's report

Title: Primary care capitation payments in the UK.

Version: 1 Date: 22 March 2010

Reviewer: Hal Swerissen

Reviewer's report:

This is an important and well defined study with significant implications for primary care payments policy in the UK. The methods are well described and detailed and the analysis is based on sound data. The reporting is relevant and balanced. The discussion and conclusion are adequately supported by the data. The paper is appropriately titled and clearly written.

In the section on the Carr-Hill allocation formula, a brief discussion of the relative contribution of the six constituent indices to the overall patient weight should be outlined. Similarly the range and distribution of the weightings should be briefly described to give the reader and indication of the impact of the aggregate weightings on practice income. There is an extensive literature on case mix which seeks to show the extent to which patient weightings explain actual cost variations. There should be a brief outline of the extent to which there is empirical evidence relating the Carr-Hill patient weightings to actual variations in practice costs.

The paper does not discuss the rationale for shifting from the original to the modified ASI. What is the argument that has been advanced for doing so? Does it stand scrutiny?

The paper could describe the policy choices to deal with the problem of inequity more clearly. For example, the policy choices could be described as (1) to maintain aggregate expenditure and leave current inequities in place, (2) maintain aggregate expenditure and redistribute funds equitably, or (3) increase aggregate expenditure and distribute funds equitably. Arguably maintaining the status quo through the use of a 'correction factor' is least controversial. Reallocating existing funds to ensure equity is most efficient but also most controversial. Finally, increasing the overall quantum for general practice with no benefits to patients is inefficient. Which of these alternatives (or some other) do the authors support?

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 declare that I have no competing interests