Author's response to reviews

Title: Comparison of Outpatient Health Care Utilization among Returning Women and Men Veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq

Authors:

Mona Duggal (mona.duggal@yale.edu)
Joseph L. Goulet (Joseph.Goulet@va.gov)
Julie Womack (juliewomack@sbcglobal.net)
Kirsha Gordon (Kirsha.Gordon2@va.gov)
Kristin Mattocks (Kristin.Mattocks@va.gov)
Sally Haskell (Sally.Haskell@va.gov)
Amy C. Justice (amy.justice2@va.gov)
Cynthia A. Brandt (cynthia.brandt@yale.edu)

Version: 4 Date: 2 June 2010

Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editors and Reviewers,

Thank you very much for the thoughtful review and for accepting our paper for publication.

As suggested, we have further revised the paper according to the reviewer’s (Dr. Maciejewski) comments.

In the letter, the reviewer’s (Dr. Maciejewski) comments are in bold and our answers are indented and normal text. The content from the paper is in italics and in quotation marks. The page numbers start from title page.

**In response to Dr. Maciejewski concerns, we respond as follows:**

**Minor Essential Revisions**

1) **Page 8 discussion of Table 3:** The authors should state that "Women health care users were more likely than men health care users to be younger, single,..." The sentence currently reads: "Women were more likely than men...." The addition of "users" or "health care users" will clarify for the reader that Table 3 is conditioned on being a user of VA health care.

   We have restated the statement as suggested.

   The changes are described **on page 8 in the results section paragraph 3: lines 2-4:**

   "Women health care users were more likely than men health care users to be younger (Table 3) (mean age 31 vs. 34 years, p<0.001), single (74% vs. 62 %, p<0.001) and non-white (24% vs. 12%, p<0.001)."

2) Since the authors took the time and care to assess use separately from intensity of use among users, I would recommend modifying the interpretation of results in the abstract, the discussion section, and the conclusion section. The current paper says that "women veterans had higher overall utilization", which might be misinterpreted by readers as more visits. However, that isn't the case. I would recommend instead saying that "women veterans were more likely to seek VA care than men veterans, but the intensity of use was similar between women and men users of VA care" or something along those lines. That is more consistent with the results.

   As suggested, we have restated the interpretation of results in the conclusion of the abstract, the discussion section, and the conclusion section.

   **The changes are described as follows:**

   **Abstract: page 2 under conclusion: lines 1-3:**

   "Recently discharged OEF/OIF women Veterans were more likely to seek VA health care than men veterans. But the intensity of use was similar between women and men VA care users."
Discussion: page 10 paragraph 2:lines 4-6 highlighted in yellow

Although this analysis is reflective of only those Veterans who sought health care at a specific VA facility and may not reflect OEF/OIF Veterans in other VA networks or those using services outside the VA, the results of our study support our hypothesis that OEF/OIF women Veterans were more likely to seek VA care than men Veterans. But the intensity of use was similar between women and men users of VA care. The insufficient power, may explain why the intensity of utilization and interaction terms were insignificant.

Conclusion: page 12:lines 1-2

Our results suggest that in recently discharged veterans women were more likely to seek VA care than men Veterans, indicating the need for comprehensive gender-specific outpatient care services for women within the VA healthcare system.

Thank You for your constructive comments. We hope that we have sufficiently addressed the editors and reviewer’s concerns.

Sincerely,

Mona Duggal and Cynthia Brandt (for the authors)