Reviewer’s report

Title: A cost minimisation analysis alongside a clustered randomised trial in teledermatology

Version: 1 Date: 8 April 2009

Reviewer: AW Armstrong

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Overall, this is a well-written cost minimization analysis that will contribute significantly to the teledermatology literature. I would like to commend the authors for taking a rigorous economic evaluation of the conventional versus store-and-forward teledermatology practices in the Netherlands. I have the following comments:

Major Compulsory Revisions

- Please explain in greater detail processes by which the patients are cared for in the teledermatology group. After they see the teledermatologist, did the teledermatologist make the decision to refer patient back to the GP versus seeing the patient live in the dermatology clinic? One would imagine that for minor dermatologic conditions, once the recommendation is sent back to the GP, there would be no need for the patient to follow up with any dermatologists live. Therefore, please clarify, "For the purpose of this study, all patients from the intervention and control group were required to visit a dermatologist in the outpatient hospital clinic and were placed on the regular waiting list (for up to twelve weeks), irrespective of their degree of recovery."

-- The authors stated that, "The costs of conventional GP care only consisted of the first consultation costs (duration of consultation with referral to a dermatologist), while teledermatology GP care costs also contained the costs of the diagnostics and treatment following the teledermatology advice, as well as subsequent follow-up visits." I would like to hear from the authors the justification for not accounting for the subsequent costs of the diagnostics and treatment following conventional dermatologic care. It would seem that, some diagnostic and treatments are inevitable regardless of which comparison group the patient belongs, and therefore, accounting for these costs in both groups would result in a more realistic comparison.

-- The authors stated that, "For website development costs, hosting and maintenance a professional ICT organisation providing such services was consulted." Please provide citation for which organizations
were consulted. Website development and maintenance costs can be a major cost component of a S&F teledermatology operation, and they can vary widely depending on the type of application that is used. Which sources were used to obtain these costing data on website development and maintenance?

--For the uncertainty analysis, how were the 31 parameters selected?