Reviewer's report

Title: What doctors think about the impact of managed care tools on quality of care, costs, autonomy, and relations with patients

Version: 1 Date: 24 May 2010

Reviewer: Paul Marschall

Reviewer's report:

General Remark

The authors analyse physicians' opinion about different instruments which might be included in health policy reforms. Their results are not surprising, but they provide further insights for tuning and shaping the implementation process.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. From health policy perspective the rising health care expenditures are regarded as the main problem and not the corresponding costs. Both concepts are rather different from an economic point of view: expenditures refer to actual payments; costs may include further components like indirect costs. You should adjust your argumentation according to that. Unfortunately most politicians are not economists and therefore both concepts are mixed in public discussion. You should also take into account in your “limitations” that the doctors you contacted could have a different understanding of “health care costs”.

2. Include the number of responses within the text (p. 6) and explain whether the response rates were sufficient and representative for detailed in-depth analyses.

3. Because the earnings of physicians in private practice can be directly linked with health care expenditures their answers might be much more biased than the answers of the doctors who are paid by salary. Therefore you should better control for the practice setting when making your further analyses.

4. You constructed global opinion scores as the average of the expected impacts (p.7). You mention that physicians might differ concerning their assessment of the importance of the included categories. Did you made sensitivity analyses of your results based on different “general” weightings?

Minor Essential Revisions
1. Please reconsider your final conclusion.

a) You have not confronted the physicians with the question: “which kind of option do you prefer?”

b) Physicians are only one of many stakeholders in the health care sector. They do not have to be altruists. It is legitimate that they have their own interests and it is comprehensible that they prefer options with less impact on their own autonomy and less consequences for their earnings.

c) It is important that we compare resulting problems at the level of health care providers with the corresponding gains or losses for the whole society. Based on that we can theoretically think about which kind of reform package might be appropriate.

2. Generally people can make judgements based on different kind of perspectives. There is fuzziness in your questions. It is not completely clear that the practitioners had really to state their own opinion.

Discretionary Revisions

1. You should better link your tables with your running text.

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:

I declare that I have no competing interests