Reviewer’s report

Title: Horizontal equity and mental health care: A study of priority ratings by clinicians and teams at outpatient clinics

Version: 2 Date: 22 March 2012

Reviewer: Richard Morriss

Reviewer’s report:

This is a much improved report and I would be happy to recommend acceptance. I think the G analysis has definitely been informative.

Minor essential.
Personally I think the data provided in your study lends some support for the national recommendation that there should be one consistent central team reviewing referrals for acceptance. The G study shows that the differences appear to be more within team than between teams. Only 7 out of 16 of these community teams followed the national guidance for such a consistent central team to make these decisions. If there was such a central team then it should be possible to air differences in ratings due to philosophy, clinical approach etc and improve agreement through training. I agree standardised referral letters form GPs that contained the information that the team needed (and would be sent back to the GP if it did not) would be a good idea. I think that until these steps are taken it is not possible to say whether it is the Act and the guidance that are not satisfactory, or that the implementation of this Act has not been given enough care and consideration. However, if the authors took this data to the relevant authorities, then an implementation strategy could be carried out and the study repeated. This should be discussed.

However I would congratulate the authors as the data now show what can be done in terms of applying psychometric research methods to examine how national legislation is being implemented. There are few published examples of this and publication of this paper might encourage other clinical groups with academic colleagues to look at the impact of these real life policies might on issues such as equality of access to care. The study would be even more impressive if subsequently there was some political action and the study repeated again as I suggest. It would then be an example of a public health mental intervention with evidence of a real impact on equity of access to care.

Minor amendment.

On page 5 a minor typographical error. "This sample based on such a clustered randomizations..." Randomization should not be in the plural so I would write "This sample based on such clustered randomization..."

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely
related research interests

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