Reviewer’s report

Title: Factors associated with the utilization and costs of health and social services in frail elderly patients

Version: 1 Date: 20 March 2012

Reviewer: Joan Gené Badia

Reviewer’s report:

The paper is of interest because it analyses if the municipal social services are equitable and explores the relationship between the social care and the health care in the frail elderly. It is of general interest because many European countries have social services managed at the municipal level.

Although methods are not well explained. It is a major limitation to categorize the service as integrated or not integrated only by a single question to the health or social care provider. Integration is a complex matter, a continuum, not a yes or not situation. This relevant concept for the paper conclusions is subjective, and is not defined in the paper and not clarified to the surveyed professionals.

The absence of the social and economic variables in the analysis of the factors related to health and social services utilisation is an important limitation of the study. Results and conclusions might vary if such variables were considered in the analysis.

Comments to the authors

- Major Compulsory Revisions (which the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Introduction

1.- In the introduction authors must mention other papers with same or similar objectives

2.- The purpose of the study must be better presented. Authors must mention the subjects of the study (elderly patients with chronic conditions and dependent / frail elderly persons)

Methods

3.- The inclusion criteria must be clarified in the method section, despite these criteria have been published in the previous paper (randomised controlled trial concerning a geriatric rehabilitation programme designed for frail elderly)

4.- Authors must clarify which definition of “frail elderly patient” are using (provide reference). Different definitions of this concept exist in the literature.
5.- A brief explanation of the social and health care services in Finland is also needed for international readers

6.- Please, provide some important information such is:

- When the study was performed?
- Reference of the questionnaires (service utilisation) used and notice if they are validated in your country.
- How this data are codified
- Provide reference of the cost per service scheme
- Validation of the self-reported questionnaire the availability and extent of informal care
- the availability and extent of informal care
- Description of the rehabilitation programme

7.- Why didn't you assess the formal help with the number of hours per week? Are all of the similar?

Results

8.- A statistical test must be used to show the statistical differences between the population under and over 75.

9.- Provide figures for your the statements:
- “Independent living and better functional ability (FIM) decreased health care utilization (not tabulated).”
- “Every five year increment in age and living alone increased the probability of social services utilization. Availability of informal care reduced the probability”.
- “The integrated social and health care sector was not significantly related to costs in the multivariate setting (not tabulated)”

Discussion

10.- Is the sample representative of the Finish Elderly population? If not state as a limitation of the study.

- Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

11.- You also may conclude that your social services are reactive, because services are targeted to the population with worse health

12.- You can explain why there is a variability in the social services and not in the health services if both are based at the municipal level in Finland?

- Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use
of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

13.- In table 2 authors must mention that the unit are €

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

**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’