Reviewer’s report

Title: Awareness and Management of Chronic Disease, Insurance Status, and Health Professional Shortage Areas in the REasons for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke (REGARDS): A Cross-Sectional Study

Version: 6 Date: 17 January 2012

Reviewer: Norrina Allen

Reviewer’s report:

Access to health care can play a critical role in the health of an individual. In this cross-sectional study in the REGARDS cohort, the authors examined the impact of geographic access to primary care (living in a primary care HPSA) and financial access to care (insurance status) on the awareness, treatment, and control of cardiovascular risk factors. Their findings that uninsured individuals may achieve lower control of hypertension despite similar or higher awareness highlights the importance of access to care for chronic disease. The question under study has great public health importance, the writing is clear, and the statistics are appropriate. However, there are some questions that remain.

1) HPSAs are not primarily designated at the county level, why was that the unit of analysis? Exclusion of counties only partially covered by HPSA designation may be biasing the population being studied, please address.

2) It would be interesting to have a statistical test to determine if there are truly differences in the impact of HPSA residence by insurance status, please include an interaction term for insurance*HPSA.

3) HPSA may simply be a marker for other county characteristics, such as urban vs rural, which may be confounding the relationship. The findings should be adjusted for these county characteristics or at least a descriptive table should be presented.

4) Although individuals live in a county, they may not be seeking primary care there, thus you may be misclassifying exposure status. Please discuss and address.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests