Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Amenable mortality as a performance indicator of Italian health care services

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 9 March 2012

**Reviewer:** fred paccaud

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**Major Compulsory Revisions**

(i) The reference to "external validation" characterizing one of the scope of the study is misleading. The term is formally inappropriate (external validity usually refers to the possibility to generalize the results of a specific study). It is also conceptually flawed. At best, the study provides several arguments showing a convergence of amenable mortality with selected indicators (i.e., life expectancy). But this is by no mean a validation of the indicator as stated in the discussion and in the conclusion.

(ii) The most interesting part of the paper is the lack of relationship between health care resources and amenable mortality. Some in-depth analysis of the specific resources needed to treat specific amenable diseases would be welcome in the paper.

(iii) Part of the discussion is devoted to the inverse relationship between amenable mortality and the prevalence of both cardiovascular disease and cancer, describing this inverse relationship as "unexpected". It is not. Amenable deaths from specific diseases must be first diagnosed (and sometimes screened) to be then treated and cured. In this perspective, an inverse relationship is expected. What would be surprising is an inverse relationship between amenable mortality and incidence of cancer or cardiovascular disease.

(iv) Figures 2 and 3 do not suggest a north south gradient but rather a clear-cut divide above and below the Rome region, with one exception (Puglia). Figure 2 would be more informative if more than three categories of mortality rates are used.

**Minor Essential Revisions**

(v) In epidemiology, SMR usually refers to ratio (i.e., to the indirect standardization), and not to standardized mortality rates (direct standardization), which are thus expressed as a percentages. Although defined in the methods section, the use of SMR in the text and in the figures is a bit confusing for the reader.

**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:

no competing interest