Reviewer's report

Title: Clinical decision support must be useful, functional is not enough: - A qualitative study of computer-based clinical decision support in primary care

Version: 1 Date: 2 February 2012

Reviewer: Alexander Fiks

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. The authors' primary conclusion is that decision support must be perceived as useful to be used. However, this idea is presented as one of many in the results. Better justification is needed, based on the data, that usefulness really was the determining factor in whether or not the decision support was used (as opposed to the many other factors that the authors describe).

This justification is especially important since the "technology acceptance model" that informed this study prioritizes perceived usefulness and ease of use as the main determinants of actual IT use. The reader (and reviewer) should be convinced by the qualitative data that usefulness truly was most important.

2. Table 2 addresses focus group themes. These are nicely organized. However, it would be very helpful to include quotations and additional text that elaborates these themes in much more detail and with a focus on their implications for the design and implementation of clinical decision support.

3. One of the strengths of qualitative research is its ability to describe how or why things occur. It would very much improve the manuscript if some comments could be added on how or why CDS was deemed as useful or not useful by the clinicians and what process might be used to maximize usefulness.

4. The issue of the nurses' inability to respond to your questions is unusual. You mention in the Discussion that this may reflect a failed implementation among the nurses. Much more detail is needed regarding how the CDS was introduced and how (if at all) the nurses were trained in using the CDS. Also, it will help to understand what impact the CDS was meant to have on the nurses. Many of the modules seem primarily directed at physicians.

Minor Essential Revisions: None.

Discretionary Revisions:

1. A few more details on the practice setting in the Methods section would enable the reader to better understand the context of this study.

2. At least one screen shot of the system would be helpful for the reader in order to better understand the user interface.
Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I am the co-inventor of a piece of software known as the Care Assistant that provides clinical decision support within electronic health records. I hold no patent and have earned no income from the invention.