Reviewer’s report

**Title:** Designation, Diligence and Drift: Understanding Laboratory Expenditure Increases in British Columbia, 1996/97 to 2005/06.

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 10 October 2012

**Reviewer:** Devidas Menon

**Reviewer’s report:**

This manuscript focuses on physician payments for laboratory tests in a province of Canada over a specified time interval. This includes all tests and all ordering physicians for conditions for which consensus guidelines exist. There are issues with each of these components which raise questions to this reviewer regarding the contribution of this work, as written, to the peer-reviewed literature.

**Major compulsory revisions:**

1. On page 4, the top paragraph specifies the analysis as being "1996/97" to "2005/06". These are 1-year periods, whereas diagnosis is confirmed after examining data over a 2-year period. I find the time periods stated in the text somewhat confusing, and would liked to have seen this explained more clearly.

2. There is no rationale for the selection of the 2 periods of time for comparison purposes. Some context should be provided.

3. On page 5, in lines 9 to 12, the authors justify the way in which they have defined chronic conditions as being "consistent with prior research". But has the approach been validated in some more specific way? The repeated use of a method by the same research group may not be sufficient to have it accepted as good practice. This needs to be addressed.

4. In the top paragraph of page 6, it is suggested that "all tests" would be included. But the authors should be more specific and explain that these are the physician fees associated with the tests, and there might be other costs. In fact, some discussion of how these "other costs" might impact health expenditures should be provided.

5. Lab test ordering in this study includes all physicians, regardless of specialty. I would think that the reasons for seeing a GP as opposed to a specialist especially for chronic disease management, would be different. Therefore, there might be different reasons for ordering a test, which might not be in compliance with the guidelines (but would be good practice nonetheless). There needs to be some explanation of the errors that might be being introduced by pooling all physicians.

**Minor essential revisions:**

1. In the 2nd paragraph of page 6, I would have liked to see more of a description of the "administrative fee". This section is not clear.
2. I don't really think that the mathematical expression in the "Analysis" section represents a "framework". It is actually not even a mathematical identity. I would suggest "unpacking" this relationship and providing more detail about the elements.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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