Reviewer’s report

Title: Expected health gain in the UK Quality and Outcomes Framework is not associated with the size of financial incentives: cross-sectional analysis

Version: 1 Date: 16 February 2012

Reviewer: Paula Cooper

Reviewer’s report:

The question is clearly posed and this work considers the relationship between financial incentives through the Quality and Outcomes (QOF) scheme and expected health gain. Data is taken from the GMS contract, from the NHS Information Centre and recognised published information on health outcomes (QALYs) arising out of the QOF.

1. Discretionary revision: Since data is only available for 28 of the 80 clinical indicators, a reader would have found it useful to see whether these differed in any systematic way from those indicators unaccounted for in the analysis and indeed some indication of how many of these may be mutually independent.

The calculation of the marginal incentive payment for the increase in performance is well described and makes the paper accessible and useful. However the ‘achievable’ lives saved assumes that these are distributed evenly across all percentage increases in performance i.e. more health gains may be achieved in those people reached later rather than earlier.

Limitations of the study are discussed and qualified, and the authors acknowledge the previous use of data.

The title reflects appropriately the nature of the work and the abstract indicates the results as they are explained within the body of the paper.

2. Discretionary revision: The abstract conclusion intimates a degree of confidence with the results that is not necessarily reflected in the results. This is given that the p values of the Spearman’s tests are non-significant – i.e. absence of evidence rather than evidence of absence. This would point to further work as the authors suggest.

I feel that the paper is a useful contribution and a research topic to build upon. I cannot suggest that there are any major compulsory revisions required. The comments that I have made are observations and although some comments have been made regarding the 28 indicators I would suggest that these are minor and as such can be managed as discretionary revision concerns.

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

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