Author's response to reviews

Title: What aspects of primary care predict emergency admission rates? A cross sectional study.

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
The Biomed Central editorial Team


Thank you for consideration of our manuscript for publication and your further comments.

We have reviewed the above manuscript according to your reviewer’s comments.

Editor revisions:
The reviewers are now satisfied that you have addressed their major concerns, however the issue of measuring quality of care by using QOF points scored still needs to be addressed. I have suggested two possible approaches to this issue (see below). If either approach is acceptable to the authors, then I can recommend the paper for publication.

Essential revisions:
I note the authors response to the issue of using total clinical care points to assess the relationship between practices' quality of clinical care and admissions rate. However, it remains the case that QOF scores, whilst linked by a payment formula to a measure of quality, do not themselves measure quality of care. The QOF scheme uses maximum payment thresholds that are exceeded by the majority of practices for the majority of indicators, and this therefore makes QOF score a very poor discriminator of quality of care. Achievement rates are much better for the purpose of measuring quality, and the authors objections to using them are somewhat spurious.

However, given the strengths of the paper, this issue should not present a major obstacle to publication. There are two possible solutions:

1. If a proxy of quality of care is to be included in the models, a measure of achievement should be substituted for points scored.

2. If points scored is to be included in the models, it should be made clear throughout the paper that this measure represents the basis for remuneration for the practices under a pay-for-performance scheme, and not - directly - quality of care. This distinction is important.

- We have chosen option 2 for the paper making it clear that QoF does not measure achievement of quality. This is reflected in changing the title and sections of the paper that relate to quality.

- The reason for choosing option 2 is that in choosing option 1 would be difficult as there is no standard indicator in QOF that gives a measure of achievement of quality. We agree that total points are not a good measure of quality. In selecting specific indicators that are better measures of quality we would need empirical evidence or a very good theory for our selection and we are unaware of either in the literature. Furthermore, the more variables we enter into the model, the more likely we are to find a significant association by chance.