Reviewer's report

Title: Reducing unnecessary hospital days to improve quality of care through physician accountability: a cluster randomised trial

Version: 2 Date: 16 July 2012

Reviewer: Sasha Shepperd

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Major Compulsory Revisions
1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

The authors set out to answer a clear and well defined question to address the problem of unnecessary prolonged lengths of hospital stay. The intervention being tested is in 2 parts and is referred to as a quality improvement strategy. The background section would be strengthened by the addition of text that demonstrates how the interventions fit into a quality improvement framework.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

Overall the methods are appropriate and well described. The two areas that require an additional explanation are:

i) the ‘index day’ i.e., how is this identified and what does it represent?

ii) the rationale for including mortality, within 30 days of discharge from the day of admission, as an event that is counted as a readmission.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

The description of the sample size calculation could be improved by explaining how the ICC impacts on the sample size calculation. Similarly the description of the analysis could be improved by demonstrating how the clustering effect has been accounted for, and for the analysis to reflect the impact of clustering on the results. In addition the rationale for assessing effectiveness at different time periods has not been presented.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

The authors state that they have followed current reporting guidance, no flow charts describing the conduct of the trial were provided with the manuscript.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

This is difficult to judge as the analysis has not taken into account the clustering effect.
6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The title is accurate; the abstract is not clear and would be improved by revisions to the results section. The sentence describing that follow-up confirmed the difference does not make sense for a result that is not statistically significant.

7. Is the writing acceptable?
There are a few problems with style which can be dealt with by careful editing.

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests