Reviewer's report

Title: Do referrals by NHS Direct save the NHS money? A cost-minimisation study of 1,001 NHS Direct users

Version: 1 Date: 25 April 2013

Reviewer: Andrew Larner

Reviewer's report:

This is a well-presented analysis of the financial impact of NHS Direct services. To my knowledge, the authors statement (p13) that "no formal economic evaluations of NHS Direct have been reported in peer-reviewed journals" is correct and hence this analysis, despite the carefully acknowledged shortcomings, is most welcome. (If only such data had been available from pilot studies of NHS Direct 10 years ago, or before recent service reconfiguration!) Of course the group analysed is small compared to the total number of NHS Direct callers but the authors have tried to ensure that it is representative and performed appropriate sensitivity analyses.

Minor (discretionary) points:

p2, lines 7-9 from bottom: "data was" to read "data were"?
p3, line 5-6 from bottom: "we were able show" to read "we were able to show"?

Table 2: why is the total 996 and not 1001? were data not available for 5 patients? or is this a consequence of the weighting procedure?

p7, line 5: "From this perspective, the trends from Figure 2 are reversed." Does this need to be qualified: "with the exception of Walk-in centre"?

p9, line 4: "and follow-up" to read "and follow-up (Figure 7)"? Otherwise Figure 7 doesn't seem to be mentioned in the text.

p10, line 12: 800 + 191 = 991; why does this not sum to 1001? Data absent on 10 patients?
p10, line 4 from bottom: "16.14" perhaps better to say 16.1, for consistency with p9, line 3?
p14, lines 4-5 from bottom: "The authors are actively considering such a design". I think this is redundant and suggest omitting it.

p15, line 6: for "recommendations" read "recommendation"?

p16, line 5 from bottom: can the authors explain the ca. 4 year delay between presentation of the report and submission of this article? Seems odd.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

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