Reviewer’s report

Title: Access to the US Department of Veterans Affairs Health System: Self-reported Barriers to Care among Returnees of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom

Version: 2 Date: 3 November 2013

Reviewer: Joanna Stewart

Reviewer’s report:

Major

1. The comments about differences in barriers in the 2 groups should not be made when there is no evidence at all that the differences are not likely to be due to chance. This does not mean you need to adhere to a strict cut off of the traditional p=.05 if there are sizable differences in estimates which would be very important if they were real and the test for a difference has a reasonably small p value. In this case you should report the situation. However the differences that are commented on such as wait times, where the paper states that participants in the OEF-OIF group were more likely to report barriers in wait times, are only small with absolutely no evidence that they are likely to not be due to chance. They should therefore not be commented on as being different. Obviously if you take 2 samples you will get a different estimate. The chance of 2 estimates being identical is very small but when the study has produced no indication that the populations from which they are drawn are likely to differ on the characteristic it is misleading to make comment. Adding comment that it is not statistically significant as has been done in some parts of the paper is not adequate as the assumption would be that there is weak evidence of a real difference if you are commenting on it, but it simply did not reach the critical level you have chosen to use. This is not true in most places in this paper.

2. It does seem quite remarkable that not even an error of an estimate of the 8 variables in common included in the models including any barrier and distance barrier differed. Although it is not surprising they are similar, to be identical would be remarkable – are you sure there has not been a cut and paste problem? The significance annotation for married is different in the 2 models, perhaps indicating that it is against the wrong estimate.

3. It is a little confusing to list different variables associated with the same outcome from the 3 models differing only in 1 explanatory variable. In fact the estimates do not differ much at all. It would be better to decide your main analysis and comment on the variables which appeared to be associated in this model and then simply comment that this was similar in the other 2 models. You are including the details in the table so people can see the detail if they wish.

4. Discussion – remove the 4th sentence about differences – see above – the evidence is too weak to make comment, even giving the qualification of not
statistically different

5. P16 last sentence in 1st full paragraph. Can not say that the analysis of this cross sectional study suggests that if access barriers were removed OEF-OIF returnees might use VA services exclusively. This sentence should be deleted

Minor
1. P14 in paragraph above the instruction to insert table 2 - logistic regression (not logistical)
2. P15 top line – you are reporting odds ratios, not relative risks so they had 7 times greater odds, not risk
3. P16 1st complete paragraph – change ‘chances’ to ‘odds’ (3 places)
4. Additional table 3 typo in the error for ‘other non working’ in model 4

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