Reviewer's report

Title: Factors associated with utilisation of GP services by a cohort of people who inject drugs

Version: 2 Date: 20 March 2014

Reviewer: David Moore

Reviewer's report:

The article is well written and addresses an important issue concerning the factors associated with primary healthcare utilization among PWID population. In my view, the article would be strengthened by addressing the following issues:

Major revision:

Title: The title should be changed to emphasize that this is a cross-sectional survey, even though it is drawn from a cohort study.

Abstract: Please add the ORs and CIs from the multivariate model to the results. The conclusion statement can be shortened.

Background: The background section is somewhat long and should be more focused. In particular, there is an extensive discussion on the need for more data on the enablers and barriers to health care utilization. However, this study does not provide any additional information on this. The study objective should be more clearly stated with particular reference to what is novel about this study.

Methods: The study design and data analysis sections are clear, but instead of listing all the exposure variables in the text, I think presenting those variables in a table would be more appropriate.

Some information on individuals who only use OST services and not other GP services should be provided (see comments in discussion below).

I am not familiar with the use of Pearson’s Chi-square tests for determining model fit (see results below). I would have more confidence in your final model if you used Aikake Information Criterion.

Results/tables: Some description of what proportion of the sample was recruited by the different strategies is needed.

Please provide separate tables of the bivariate analyses and the logistic regression models.

The final model has over 12 variables in it, several of which have multiple responses. This may account for the fact that few of these variables are found to be independently associated with the outcome. Are you confident that this model is the best fit for your data?

I found the service utilization section a bit confusing. It is not obvious from the text what variable was your main outcome. Was it the 62% (had accessed either
general or PWID-specific health services in the past month) or the 29% (had at least one visit to a GP for a health-related reason in the past month)? It would be helpful to include numerators and denominators, in addition to percentages.

Discussion:

What does this study add to the existing literature?

Low income seen as a barrier to health care access is not novel.

One of the conclusions of this study, is that more frequent injectors are less likely to access non-OST GP services. However, if they are accessing OST, this would seem to be an opportunity to engage such individuals in other types of primary care. Can you provide some information (in the results) with respect to the characteristics of participants who only use OST services?

While the finding that PWID with children are more likely to access GP services is interesting, is there not a high likelihood that their IDU would not be disclosed for fear of parents losing custody of their children?

The limitation section is rather brief. A major limitation is the lack of description of enabling factors and barriers to health care. Also, the direction of these associations cannot be determined b/c of the cross-sectional nature of the analysis. In particular, it is not clear what the direction of the association between self-reported health status should be. Should more ill PWID seek GP visits, or would one expect that PWID who are more functional and more stable be more likely to visit GPs?

As this is a cohort study, it would seem that some of the limitations of this analysis could be addressed by conducting a longitudinal analysis, rather than cross sectional.

Minor revision:

Abstract: Note that this is a secondary analysis conducted on data from the MIX study.

Background: OST should be spelt out the first time it is used (on p 1 of background).

Results: Please add a definition for the low-income cut-off for Australia

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests