Reviewer's report

Title: What can we learn from surveying practitioners by regarding their practices?

Version: Date: 10 September 2003

Reviewer: Robbie Foy

Reviewer's report:

General

Summary. This paper reports a postal questionnaire survey of various specialists (mainly medical oncologists, neurologists, radiation oncologists, and surgeons) who manage patients with neurological diagnoses. The survey aimed to describe current reported practice in relation to anticonvulsant use in patients with malignant glioma who had never had a seizure and identify the level of interest in the development of a relevant guideline. 122 out of 197 (62%) responded. There were major variations in the reported use of peri-operative anticonvulsants and maintaining anticonvulsant therapy in patients undergoing surgery, and a minor variation in the use of anticonvulsants in patients not undergoing surgery. Most respondents would be willing to participate further in the guideline development process.

Validity. The questions are well defined and appropriately addressed by the design. The discussion is fair and balanced except that the authors do not comment on possible response bias associated with the 62% response rate. For example, non-respondents may have been less supportive of the need for a clinical guideline, may have been fewer relevant cases, or engage in a higher proportion of ‘suboptimal’ clinical practices.

Generalisability. The main lesson for others considering guideline development is that a pre-development survey may be useful in ascertaining practice variation and potential levels of interest.

Style. The paper is clearly written.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

P7; para 2; sentence 3. Is there a reference for the “Dillman technique”?

P7; survey methods. Would any more information on the clinical scenarios be appropriate, e.g. within an appendix? I cannot tell whether any other information – if provided in each scenario – might have influenced practitioners’ responses, e.g. patient age.

P9; para 1; sentence 4. “Neurologists”

P12; para 1; sentence 4. Two references are available to support supposition that self-reporting over-estimates actual performance:


Minor Compulsory Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

The title appears to be too general to describe this work. Readers might anticipate a wider-ranging study or discussion.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Advice on publication: Accept after minor compulsory revisions

Level of interest: A paper of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests:

None