Reviewer's report

Title: Health Insurance, Neighborhood Income, and Emergency Department Usage by Utah Children 1996-1998

Version: 1 Date: 1 November 2004

Reviewer: John Tilford

Reviewer's report:

General
The manuscript uses state data on emergency department utilization from Utah to examine utilization rates by insurance status and neighborhood income. The authors also perform a test of whether ED utilization changed for Medicaid recipients as a consequence of policy changes to increase managed care insurance for Medicaid recipients.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
There is poor correspondence between the text and the tables in places. The authors should make the manuscript better reflect the tables so the reader can follow. For example, in the results section on page 3, the authors describe a “slight decline” in the ED visit rate for commercially insured from 19.1 per 100 per year to 19.0 per hundred per year. Few folks would actually refer to such numbers as a decline, and I recommend the authors change this to virtually no change, but more importantly, table 1 describes a rate of 19.21 overall. The same is true for describing Medicaid visits. The authors describe an upward trend of 28-29 visits and then report 30.19 visits as the overall mean for Medicaid. How can this be? Is it related to reporting specific conditions in the tables and overall conditions in the text? I recommend getting the numbers to correspond across all tables and text.

Also, the authors do a poor job of explaining some of the numbers in the tables. For example, in table 2 the authors report observations ranging from 352 to 232. But in the text, they talk about 100’s of thousands of observations. How did we go from 100’s of thousands to hundreds?

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
In general, the manuscript does not read well in places. The introduction has a one-sentence paragraph that may not qualify as a true sentence. The writing needs to be improved. I recommend trying to expand on the one-sentence paragraph and other sections of the text, especially where the authors report the findings related to income and utilization. More needs to be said, not less.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

None