Author's response to reviews

Title: Hospital Service Areas - A new tool for Health Care Planning in Switzerland.

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Author's response to reviews:

Response to Reviewer Comments

MS: 1173998623574565 'Hospital Service Areas - A new tool for Health Care Planning in Switzerland.'

In this document we addressed the comments of both reviewers. We provide a point-by-point response to each comment, detailing how it has been revised in the manuscript. The entire manuscript has furthermore been prove read by a native English speaker (Dr. Christoph Ritter, Bern).

Discretionary Revisions (Guagliardo)

1. We uses the BMC manuscript template [BMC154d.doc] from the Internet site of BMC Health Services Research. The template did not have double spaces so we assumed this was the required format. We are happy to provide the revised version double-spaced. Missing page numbers are also included. We apologize for their omission!

2. We added blanks after each paragraph. Thank you!

3. We included the suggested publication into our reference list and cited it at two appropriate locations of the manuscript.

4. We added a separate map on Swiss topography and one brief paragraph to familiarize the reader with Swiss topography. All other maps received a background layer which depicts topography.

Minor Essential Revisions (Guagliardo)

1. All "Mio" were changed to "Million". Thank you!

2. We added an 's' when HSA were referred to in plural form.

3. We added an 's' when LI/MSI/II were referred to in plural form.

4. We changed "demand induced supply" to "supplier induced demand". Special thanks for detecting this
mistake! Surprisingly we had it correct in the very first draft of the manuscript ...

5. We changed "variation phenomena" to "variations".

6. We revised the two sentences of paragraph 2 starting "Health service areas have been ..." to make our point clearer. An example is given to indicate the importance of small area analysis for health care planning.

7. We provided our rationale for using the time period of 1998 till 2001.

8. We added the important information into the method section why zip codes were not used to create HSAs. We decided against the recommendation to move the implications of this situation from the Discussion to the Method section. In our view the area model we were forced to use represents a limitation of our study which we wanted to discuss in the appropriate section. We hope the reviewer can accept our decision.

9. "215" was changed to "Two-hundred-and-fifteen"

10. We explained the use of the 1990 census instead of 2000 census data.

11. We rephrased this sentence according to the reviewer's recommendation.

12. We added a paragraph break. Thank you for pointing out this change of topic.

13. The two lines in the figure were capitalized.

Major Compulsory Revisions (Guagliardo)

1. Figure 1 was broken down into 3 separate maps. This allowed a brief introduction of Swiss topography. We decided to present a map of census regions and a map of HSA separately to avoid overcrowding. Names were omitted entirely as they do not confer much extra information to the international reader. Five cities were added instead in our first map.

2. Figure 2 was altered to avoid redundancy. Explanatory text was added to the graph to ease readability. We furthermore included a matrix graph of health utilization rates.

3. Statistic: In the result section we eliminated comparisons of parameters which made the analysis section appear 'without plan'. The reviewer criticized our statistical section to be unnecessarily brief. In our view the paper primarily presents descriptive statistics. Restructuring the result section with appropriate headings hopefully increases readability.

4. Discussion:

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Discretionary Revisions (Gessler)

1. We added the recommended reference of Goody at the Background section when discussion different methods of delineating HSAs. The article was retrievable in PDF-Format through our university library.

The two other references in book format [Ricketts, Griffith] were not obtainable in the short time period of three weeks. As we could not personally assess the content of those dereferences we refrained from citation. We do hope that the reviewer understands our line of thought.

Minor Essential Revisions (Gessler)

1. Switzerland is added in the Objectives of the Abstract.

2. The sources of LI and II are provided more clearly. We added an introduction describing the core variables used for the calculation of all health utilization indices. We also added the market share index and its complementary characteristic to the influx index.

3. The sentence was removed entirely as we restructured the result-section. Thank you for pointing out the wrong position in the first version.

Major Compulsory Revisions (Gessler)

We added a map of the influx index (II) and a map of the net patient flux (NPF) into the manuscript. We commented on the geographic distribution of both indices. Also their implications for health care planning were discussed.

We appreciated the meticulous review of your preliminary manuscript. We would like to thank both reviewers for their constructive criticism. The manuscript improved tremendously with the suggested alterations.

GK LS MW AB