Reviewer's report

Title: Validation of the Provincial Transfer Authorization Centre database: a comprehensive database containing records of all inter-facility patient transfers in the province of Ontario.

Version: 1 Date: 18 April 2006

Reviewer: Lisa Lix

Reviewer's report:

General

This is a clearly written manuscript that describes a new database that can be used for population-based studies of patient transfer between healthcare facilities in one Canadian province.

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

#1: There is lack of detail in the manuscript about several elements of the methodology: (a) chart review: Did a single researcher conduct the chart review? If more than a single researcher was involved, how was agreement between researchers established? (b) sampling frame: What was the source of the sampling frame for facilities? How many facilities of each size and type were in the sampling frame? (c) statistical analysis: The kappa statistic provides a measure of agreement for categorical (i.e., binary or nominal) data. It is not clear how the demographic variables of last name and first name, or how the primary reason variable were defined as categorical variables. It is also not clear how age was defined as a categorical variable.

#2: There are an excessive number of tables in the manuscript. Tables 1 and 2 should be combined because they contain similar data. The labels of large-volume, medium-volume, and small-volume senders as reported in Table 2 should be adopted (these labels are absent from Table 1). Then information on the expected and actual number of facilities sampled could be combined in a single table. Why not also include information about the total number of facilities in the sampling frame in this table?

#3: Table 3 requires some clarification: (a) Is the medical supervision variable a dichotomous (i.e., yes/no) variable. The description of the emergent/non-urgent field, implies that there are three possible categories: emergent, urgent, and non-urgent. Were three categories retained in the statistical analyses?

#4: Confidence intervals should be reported for the kappa and sensitivity statistics in Table 5.

#5: The conclusion section for the manuscript is too brief. The authors should discuss the potential uses of the PTAC database for population-based research. This will help to broaden the appeal of the manuscript.

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

#1: Table 5 has two blank columns on the right side. These should be deleted.
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

#1: It would be helpful to know if the PTAC is modeled on any existing administrative data sources from other jurisdictions. Again, this would help to broaden the appeal of the manuscript.

**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:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.