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: Date: 13 July 2006

Reviewer: Dan Berlowitz

Reviewer's report:

General
This manuscript describes a brief validation involving 100 records of a newly created database for describing inter-facility transfers in Ontario. There are a number of areas in which this manuscript could be improved.

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

The database is not sufficiently described. Only 12 variables were collected and compared for agreement. How many and what additional variables were there in the database? Did any of the additional variables contain relevant clinically detailed information that would be particularly valuable in research? What was \textit{primary reason for transfer}; was it an ICD-9 code or was it in free text?

The authors assert that this database will be a useful research tool. This is not obvious to me. The type of information contained in the database, such as patient name and name of the transferring facilities is not the type of data that I would consider useful in research. More relevant would be detailed clinical and demographic information on patient status at the time of transfer. More detailed examples of how the database could be useful in research would be helpful.

Five records were missing and consequently omitted from the analyses. This is a potential error. The authors need to consider why the record was missing. Perhaps it was missing because the sending facility or name variables were wrong. Thus the disagreement rate could be considerably higher.

There are many errors in the manuscript. For example, the 7th paragraph of Methods describes small transfer volume facilities as being less than 1000 when it should be less than 400. The numbering of Tables in the text is wrong in several places and a Table 6 is mentioned at the end of Results that does not exist.

Measures of agreement should be described in greater detail. For example, what is error rate? It is surprising that low rates of agreement for variables such as \textit{transfer service} are associated with such high kappas. Is this because of how missing data were handled in the calculations? If so, this should be clarified.

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

The number of Tables can be reduced by combining information from several of them.

References are extremely limited and do not consider the extensive literature on quality of administrative data.

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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 of limited interest
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests