Reviewer’s report

Title: Quality research in healthcare: are researchers getting enough statistical support?

Version: 2 Date: 17 August 2005

Reviewer: John Martin Bland

Reviewer’s report:

General
This is an interesting survey of the provision of statistical support to health researchers in the UK. The methods section also mentions a literature review, but not much appears in the paper and nothing in the results section.

The authors make a good case that the quality of medical research is often low and that in the past it has been proposed that this could be remedied by input by statisticians.

They then survey the 25 most highly supported trusts. They do not say why they did this, though perhaps their reasoning was that if these trusts do not provide statistical support, the less well endowed trusts will not. Although they say that all 25 trusts responded, there appear to be only 24 in their figure.

I do not think it is correct to say that there “does not appear to be any relationship between funding for methodological support and funding allocation.” I think there does. Perhaps “only a weak relationship, if any” would be a better way to describe this.

The results are shown in a bar chart. This is in colour and when printed using a black and white printer it is illegible. The sections of the bars cannot be distinguished. The dense grid lines also make it difficult to read.

Although the survey relates only to England, the problem of poor research is not only an English one but is worldwide. Perhaps in their discussion they could try to put their work into a global context.

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

1. The discrepancy between the 25 trusts responding and the 24 shown in the graph should be resolved.

2. The graph should be made so that it can be seen in a black and white version. At present this is impossible. They should remove the grid lines, which are very distracting.

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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)

3. Rephrase the comment about “does not appear to be any relationship between funding for methodological support and funding allocation.”.
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

4. As the literature review is not mentioned in the results it could be dropped from the methods.

5. Put the work into a wider context.

6. Spell out the rationale for their sampling method.

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 importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

Some of these authors are known to me personally and I have worked with Allyson Pollock, who is a friend. I do not think that this has biased my review.

I have no other competing interests.