Reviewer's report

Title: Referrals from general practice to consultants in Germany: If the GP is the initiator, patients' experiences are more positive

Version: 1 Date: 29 September 2005

Reviewer: Doris Young

Reviewer's report:

General
This study is useful for quality assurance between GPs and specialists in the region of study to improve their referral information. However, except for the participants, the findings of this study is of limited interests to GPs and specialists in other countries or areas as we know the content and quality of referral letters are dependent on the GPs who write them and the interpretation of the specialists who read them. Unfortunately there is also no new information provided to further our understanding of GP referral to specialists because the methodology is not rigorous enough as pointed out by the authors ie the data cannot be linked due to confidentiality. Over the years, there has been much work done to improve information exchange between GPs and specialists over referrals and templates have been developed through computerisation of referral forms etc. The finding of patient satisfaction when referrals are from GPs is interesting though no explanations were given as to why this is so.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
The authors justify the novelty of their findings and their generalisability to other health services in Germany. Would this information be used by policy makers, insurance companies, consumer groups. What is the purpose of this study? What health services improvement can occur? Is the title misleading as it is only one finding of the study, need to reflect on the study as a whole. Please explain the difference between new patients and old patients experiences as 131 (31%) patients were known by the consultants already? Difficulty arise again due to data not being linked.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
Many typos and spelling mistakes, including duplication of references, 5 & 13; 9 & 10, also please clarify in table 2 the statement by the consultant "I would have preferred to refer the patient" what does that mean? and the GP in table 3: "I disagree with the referral" does it mean the patient made the GP write the referral? I am rather confused by these statements.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Reject because too small an advance to publish

Level of interest: An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
Statistical review: No

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