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: Barbara Starfield

Reviewer's report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
Add information concerning analysis of physician satisfaction according to who initiated the referral

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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)
As you have no information on people who went directly to a specialist, this really is not a study of the gatekeeping function. Please make this clear. Please also indicate how the information on who initiated the referral was obtained---from the physician or patient or both, and how elicited?

Please indicate the percentage of visits (or, better still, the percentage of patients seen) to provide percentage of visits (or patients) who had referrals, and what the mean number and distribution of referrals per patients there were.

What is meant by the sentence 'Patient satisfaction was not yet increased if the patient initiated the referral'? This needs to be made clearer.

What is the meaning of the sentence 'GPs and patients in an individual level (due to privacy regulations'? Please clarify.

There are several similar studies from recent (past 5 years) US on referrals from family medicine and pediatrics. Authors include Forrest, C and Starfield B, and they contain date from collaborative research networks. Please discuss your findings in the light of the findings of those studies, which appeared in J Fam Practice, JAMA, and others.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests