Reviewer's report

Title: Does a referral from home to hospital affect satisfaction with childbirth? A cross-national comparison

Version: 1 Date: 14 March 2007

Reviewer: Edwin van Teijlingen

Reviewer's report:

General

Article needs to be proof read by native English speaker. E.g. ‘in the Netherlands’, not ‘in The Netherlands’.
‘The lowering impact of a referral is greatest …’, should be something like: ‘A referral has a greater negative effect on….

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

Ref. 5 refers to ‘verloskundige indicatielijst’, this list is available on the web in English, why do the authors use a secondary references to a book by De Vries? See: http://europe.obgyn.net/nederland/default.asp?page=/nederland/richtlijnen/vademecum_eng

There are some obvious distribution problems within this study as mentioned on page 5. However, the second paragraph of the Discussion which briefly addresses the shortcomings of the study does not refer to the very low response rate in some (one) hospital of 19%, and how this might influence the findings.

Page 8. The Discussion mentions in one sentence that the study can not distinguish between women who were referred antenatally two months before the bay was born and those transferred during labour. This is an important statement, as all obstetric evidence suggest that being transferred during labour in an emergency related to a much higher risk of something going wrong and hence satisfaction levels than a women being later on during pregnancy to prepare for a hospital delivery in due course.

Page 9 In the sentence ‘In other words, continuity of care is likely …’ is there perhaps a word missing? Should it read In other words, continuity of care is more likely …’?

Page 9 The statement about a triumphant nurse of midwife, would benefit from a reference.

Table 1 should have p-values, or other indication to show proportions are significantly different (or not) between Belgium and the Netherlands.
Table 1 does not include the woman’s age

I would have expected a table 3 showing the satisfaction levels as such before the detailed Table 3, which I would make Table 4. Perhaps this table is already included in the first paper quoted in Midwifery (ref. 1). Has this paper been accepted or is it under review? But the authors need to consider that their message is clear without the reader having to consult other papers!

Table 3 needs legend, the table should be clear to the reader without having to trail through the text what the reference groups are. It is unclear to me why the authors give the ‘B value’ as well as the ‘beta’. These are not discussed in the text and removing the beta columns would make the table easier to read. Unless I misunderstood the table and the beta values are important, in which case the authors need to tell the reader why!

All the references which refer to midwifery and the organisation of maternity care seem to refer to the Netherlands. There must be some academic papers on the organisation of maternity care in Belgium.

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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)

Under measurement I would expect a sentence stating ‘Copy of the instrument is available for the first
Page 9 ‘receive less qualitative hospital .., should read ‘9 ‘receive poorer quality hospital ….’

Reference 8 needs to be translated, I know the original title is half English half Dutch, but the second half is incomprehensible to the international reader of BMC Health Services Research

Explain Flanders to overseas’ reader. Until page 5 the authors have spoken about Belgium and the Netherlands, Flanders is dropped in without explanation.

Page 5 state which university hospital approved the ethics application.

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 whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have been asked ‘informally’ to act as PhD examiner for the first author’s thesis. Her PhD work is a central part of this paper.