Reviewer's report

Title: Day care cataract surgery in Central and Southern Italy: a multicentric survey

Version: 2 Date: 1 November 2006

Reviewer: Jose M. Quintana

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General
The idea of the manuscript is interesting: to study the geographical variability in a surgical procedure, as cataract surgery, which is extremely frequent (number 1 in many places). But the amount of information provided by the study of Cilino S. et al is poor. In addition, I am based on the following deficiencies that I consider important:

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

- The description of the methodology is quite poor. One misses information on key aspects of the accomplishment of the study like the following ones:
  - It is not known how the centres of each region were selected to participate in the study. Was it made at random? or the investigators chose the centres?. This aspect is important because it could indicate certain bias in the collection of the information.
  - Under my point of view, the questionnaire that the authors include in the supplement presents at least two problems: 1. - on the one hand, it includes a quite high number of open questions. As it is already well-known, to handle the data obtained by open-ended questions is quite complicated and the information obtained is usually poor; 2. – on the other side, the rest of the questions are dichotomized (yes/no) which do not provide much more detailed data. Those who respond have only two options. The open questions usually are advised to be used in the initial phases, or exploratory, of knowledge of a subject to help to construct closed-ended questions later. Closed-ended questions, which provide more information, must include, usually, more than two categories. For that reason, this questionnaire seems to provide little information, although some of the questions could be acceptable but within a questionnaire that included more questions with various categories.
  - Like with any questionnaire, it is important to provide information on its “validity” properties. This information is not included in this study.
  - The most important aspect of the manuscript is the study of the variability between different geographic zones, but the authors do not do a in depth analysis of this aspect providing, for example, with information of the characteristics of the hospitals that have participated in the study on relation to that variability, or of the patients who receive one type or another of health care … etc.
  - Also, to be a good study of variability they must have included all the centres, or most of them, of the geographic zones studied, something unknown because they do not provide with information on how many centres participated, and responded, by each zone.
  - The authors do not refer which was the response rate to the questionnaire they sent by the different geographic zones. That is to say, we do not know the percentage of non- response, neither an analysis of it, aspect quite relevant to give credibility to the study.
  - I wonder if they could have been able to provide with some additional interesting information to that included in the questionnaire from the administrative data, the mentioned as “Hospital Discharge Report” database from the Ministry of Health.

- The obtained data from the “Hospital Discharge Report”, could have been contrasted with the corresponding one of the questionnaire, and, in certain way, could it have served to validate partially some questions of the questionnaire?.
- For a health services research study as this one, it would have been important to know what factors influence the variability in the rate of interventions of day-care surgery between the different regions. That is to say, to respond to the obvious question “why so different rates between regions were found”. However, the investigators provide very basic and descriptive information.
  - It would have been necessary that in the discussion the authors evaluated the possible bias associated with the use of the questionnaire, as the quite likely presence of information bias.
  - The authors do not make any mention to any other of the possible limitations, or problems, of the study (no response, selection bias, validity of the questionnaire, generability of the results… etc.).
The discussion does not approach all the aspects contemplated in the presentation of the results (perioperative management - e.g. antibiotic prophylaxis, blood tests, type of anesthesia, uses of topical skin disinfectants, average Time of hospitalization and postoperative follow-up), which in the cases in which non justified variability was found would have been pertinent. Also, and this it is a fundamental aspect, one misses in the discussion a deeper analysis of the causes of that important variability and a comparison with other studies.

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

**What next?:** Reject because scientifically unsound

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests