Reviewer's report

Title: Doctor and practice characteristics associated with differences in patient evaluations of general practice

Version: 4 Date: 14 July 2006

Reviewer: Sudha Xirasagar

Reviewer's report:

Comments on the revised manuscript, “Doctor and practice characteristics associated with differences in patient evaluations of general practice.” July 14, 2006

The authors have addressed many concerns and provided clarifications.

Major compulsory revision:

The authors have not addressed my comment #5 which read, “The policy or clinical or professional significance of the study should be set out upfront in the introduction section. Accordingly, the study purpose (which should be distinguished from study objectives) needs to be set out in the upfront section. As of now, it is not clear what the authors seek to contribute to the field in terms of directions for action, by carrying out this study.”

I believe this is a substantive concern which needs to be addressed. The policy or professional significance of the study and its findings is what makes health services research relevant for publication and for the readership. Although the authors have now indicated the general study purpose, the introduction section still lacks the content needed to make out a case for the study, nor does it spell out what is hoped to be accomplished by studying the association between patient perceptions of care dimensions and GP characteristics. Any past literature on this type of study or related topic should also be cited if available, and an indication of how this study addresses the gaps in current knowledge, relevant for policy/practice should be presented. Similarly, in the “Discussion” section, the policy or practice significance of the statistical findings and consequent recommendations for policy makers and/or professionals are not discussed.

Minor essential revisions:

1. In the Methods section, the authors should provide a section defining “dependent variables of interest” and the “independent variables of interest.” Currently, the text is worded as if all GP variables are control variables. (The results section and the study objective treat these as the independent variables of interest.) To show that each effect is an adjusted effect accounting for the remaining variables, they should mention this in the results section.

2. The original manuscript as well as the revised one cause confusion about whether it is univariate or multivariate analysis because the title is cryptic. Detailed description of the statistical methods in the revised manuscript clarifies that Table 3 actually shows adjusted prevalence ratios. However, each table needs to stand on its own to explain what it represents. I suggest revising the table title to say something like: “Adjusted associations between patient opinions about care dimensions and GP characteristics: Findings of Multivariate analysis.”

3. Statistical analysis: In general, the current explanation of methods makes sense. However I am not a statistician, and I suggest a statistical review for appropriateness of the specific method used for each regression.

Earlier comments on the original manuscript, April-May 2006:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
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?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

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

**Statistical review:** Yes

**Declaration of competing interests:**

As indicated in the comments, I am not a statistician. The complex reasons for selecting the different multivariate methods are not my forte