Reviewer's report

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

Version: 6 Date: 16 November 2006

Reviewer: Elmer Villanueva

Reviewer's report:

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the statistical aspects of Manuscript MS 5572875749502655 “Doctor and practice characteristics associated with differences in patient evaluations of general practice” submitted to BMC Health Service Research. Overall, the Authors pursue a reasonable, conventional and uncontentious analysis plan. However, the reporting of their methods and results may be improved. It is in this spirit I make the suggestions below (all being minor essential revisions).

Minor Essential Revisions:
1. I agree with Referee 1 in his suggestion that the Authors need to specify the dependent and independent variables of interest under appropriate headings. In their rebuttal letter, the Authors claimed to have made the requisite changes. However, none were apparent (at least in the version of the manuscript I reviewed). I suggest that the Authors clearly specify which variables are dependent and which are independent.

2. I suggest that the Authors identify the labels of the models they report in the Results section as early as the Methods section. This should be done in the second and subsequent paragraphs of the Analyses subsection. I recommend that model labels be descriptive and that these labels be consistently applied throughout the text and tables. I suggest that the following labels be applied: (a) Crude PR – to replace tabular labels of “PR” specifying models that account for patient clustering alone; (b) Patient-adjusted PR – retained from the Authors original work specifying models which adjust for patient clustering and patient characteristics; (c) Fully-adjusted PR – to replace tabular labels of “Adj PR” specifying models which adjust for patient clustering, patient characteristics and GP/practice characteristics.

3. The Authors should report model diagnostic procedures and results. The appropriateness of statistical models must be examined, not taken on faith.

4. The Authors should quantify findings in the “Results” section. Instead of stating that they found “a positive association between the evaluation and GP working hours,” the Authors should state PRs and confidence intervals. Such quantitative results must be presented in the Abstract, too.

5. Tables 1 and 2 may be made more concise by omitting one category in binary variables, as the omitted category is obviously complementary to the reported category.

6. Tables 3 to 7 require revision of the footnotes and title. The current title is confusing as two contradictory terms are in use: “unadjusted” and “multivariate”. I suggest that the title be changed to “Crude and adjusted associations between patients’ evaluation of care dimensions and GP/practice characteristics.”

Footnotes need to follow accepted conventions arising from Uniform Requirements For Manuscripts Submitted To Biomedical Journals. That is, they should be ordered in this manner: *,†,‡,§,ǁ,¶,**,††,‡‡… All abbreviations need to be spelled out in footnotes.

The Authors’ suggested legend needs to be listed as footnotes according to the model label. That is, they should insert a footnote mark after the column heading “Crude PR” stating “Unadjusted PR account for patient clustering.” They should insert a footnote mark after the column heading “Patient-Adjusted PR” stating “Adjusting for patient clustering, gender, age…” They should insert a footnote mark after the column heading “Fully-Adjusted PR” stating “Adjusting for patient clustering, patient characteristics and GP/practice characteristics.”

All footnotes need to be replicated in all tables. It is unacceptable to indicate, “for footnotes, see Table xx”.


I am confident that the Authors will be able to make these changes without further review.

Sincerely,

Elmer V Villanueva

What next?: Accept after minor essential 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: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests