Author's response to reviews


Authors:

Charles D. Phillips (phillipscd@srph.tamhsc.edu)
Catherine Hawes (hawes@srph.tamhsc.edu)
Trudy Lieberman (trudy1530@aol.com)
Mary J. Koren (mjf@cmwf.org)

Version: 2 Date: 10 April 2007

Author's response to reviews: see over
AUTHORS’ RESPONSES TO REVIEWERS’ COMMENTS

Reviewer's report

Title: Where Should Momma Go? Evaluating Current Nursing Home Performance Measurement Strategies and Offering a More Conservative Alternative

Version: 1 Date: 14 March 2007

Reviewer: Thomas T.H. Wan

Reviewer's report:

This is a very interesting paper that deals with conceptual and methodological issues pertaining to the measurement of the quality of nursing home care. The five principles for developing a useful scale of the nursing home care quality are pertinent to the identification of nursing home performance. The paper is well written. Selected and relevant references are cited. Additional references should be included in the study of quality of nursing home care (e.g., Journal of Medical Systems, Western Journal of Nursing Research, etc.)

Additional references have been added.

The paper will make contributions to the scientific literature on nursing home quality and its measurement. Two amendments are suggested: 1. The paper does not consider the customer's (resident's) perspective in the evaluation of the quality of care. MDS data do not reflect well about the perceptions of health care provided by nursing homes. If the customer's view is to be considered, the authors should offer some directions in the development of the measurement scale or instrument.

The reviewer is correct. We have added the following to our discussion of limitations. “The most fundamental limitation of all nursing home performance measurement models is that none of them really allow one to hear “the resident’s voices.” Residents’ and family members’ perceptions of quality and judgments about how well care needs are being met do not come into this rather sterile world of nursing home performance measurement. No analysis strategy will remedy this. The solution will be built on new approaches to both quality measurement and quality assurance. The discussion of potential directions to go in search of these new approaches is beyond the scope of this work. Here the authors are attempting to minimize problems with the current approaches.”

2. Figure 1 presents very confusing ideas on the indicators of nursing home quality. The left-sided graph shows that the quality of care, a latent variable, is shared in common by the related indicators of quality. However, the right-sided graph represents that the quality of care is predicted by the predictor variables. It would be better to reformulate the graph that contains the measurement model as well as the predictive model as a structural equation model. Authors are advised to consult with an expert in SEM to redesign the causal model.

The authors have changed the language introducing Figure 1 to clarify our purpose in using the figure and the interpretation of the figure. “In the world of nursing home care our situation is much more analogous to what Bollen and
Lennox (1991) identify as a causal model of measurement. Changes in quality do not so much move correlated indicators of quality as changes in marginally, or uncorrelated, indicators move the larger unmeasured construct of quality (see Figure 1). A home may improve skin care, theoretically increasing the value of our unmeasured construct of quality, but that change will have no effect on their use of feeding tubes, another reasonable indicator for that larger unmeasured construct.” The source of the figure is an article by Kenneth Bollen, author of Structural Equation Models with Latent Variables in the Wiley series on statistics. It refers only to our measurement model. To introduce a structural model would require a very different focus.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Reviewer's report

Title: Where Should Momma Go? Evaluating Current Nursing Home Performance Measurement Strategies and Offering a More Conservative Alternative

Version: 1 Date: 23 February 2007

Reviewer: John F Schnelle

Reviewer's report:

General
This article provides an interesting discussion of the issues relevant to giving consumers information relevant to choosing a nursing home. However, no real evaluation of current systems or of the new proposed system is provided, and it is unclear to me if the conservative approach suggested by the authors does anything differently from the current systems. According to the discussion, provided in this paper, all of the systems are probably based on data whose relationship to the actual care residents receive is suspect and a conservative approach would be to not use any of the data to choose a home.

The authors don’t believe that these systems contain no useful information. Instead, we believe that the usefulness of the information is seriously limited. Even some of the reviewer’s research (e.g., bedfast, pain) shows that rankings on some quality indicators do reflect some differences in resident outcomes. We agree with the reviewer that these data are flawed, but we argue that by using these data in conjunction with other information, we increase the usefulness of the data.

Alternatives not described in this paper would be to visit homes and observe and ask questions for the purpose of getting first hand information. There have been several reports about how to do this including one in consumer reports.
The authors now make it a point to remind readers that observation is an important part of any evaluation. However, using observation as part of a nursing home performance measurement system is, in the authors’ opinion not feasible. Also, while there is some evidence that care observations for research are not reactive in nursing homes (Schnelle, Ouslander, & Simmons, 2006), there is also evidence that care observations for regulatory purposes may be reactive in residential care settings (Reed, Parsons, Green, & Shepsis, 1991).

Despite my concerns, I do think their discussion of the issues and the logic that guided their efforts would be of interest to the journal audience. Improvements to this discussion would be an elaboration of the validity studies and particularly those studies that directly measured if care that residents receive was different between facilities with different QI scores and staffing levels. The only discussion point was that these studies were done with no indication of what they found. A review of these studies by the National Quality Forum indicated there were no differences in observed care between facilities with different QI scores but that there were differences in observed care between facilities with different staffing. Since the entire point of the consumer reporting system is to say something about the care that residents receive, it seems that these conclusions should be discussed.

I have queried the reviewer about this study, with which I am not familiar (as least as he identifies it), but I have not yet received a response. I also can’t find this study on the NQF website.

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

none

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

none

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

none

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.