Reviewer's report

Title: Comparing patient characteristics and treatment processes in patients receiving physical therapy in the United States, Israel and the Netherlands. Cross sectional analyses of data from three clinical databases

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Reviewer: Rob Herbert

Reviewer's report:

This study uses three large clinical databases to compare referral processes and characteristics of patients receiving outpatient physiotherapy treatment in the United States, Israel and the Netherlands. The main findings were that there were remarkable similarities across countries in age, gender and body part treated, but moderate or large differences in referrers, acuteness of the health problem, treatment procedures used, and number of treatments provided.

This study addresses an issue that will be of interest to readers of the BMC Health Services Research. Overall the study appears to be methodologically sound, minor limitations of the methods have been discussed, and the manuscript is clearly written. I have only some minor comments. That is, I am recommending only discretionary revisions.

Discretionary Revisions

Abstract: The aim of the study should be stated explicitly. The Background suggests the aim was to compare referral processes and characteristics of patients receiving outpatient physiotherapy treatment in the United States, Israel and the Netherlands. However the conclusion is unrelated to this aim. (The same comment applies to the Conclusion on p11.)

Methods. It is not clear how the ‘acuity’ data were recoded. How, for example, would the LiPZ category of ‘1 week-1 month’ be re-categorised on the Macabi taxonomy (which has categories of ‘0-21 days’ and ‘21-90 days’)?

Methods: Formal statistical inference (p values) seem a bit redundant, because most comparisons will be statistically significant when the sample size is 175,000.

Results: If the intention is to compare referral processes and characteristics of patients receiving outpatient physiotherapy treatment in the United States, Israel and the Netherlands (rather than to compare the databases), the Results could refer to the country instead of the database. (For example, the first sentence on p7 could read, “In the U.S.A., more patients with lumbar spine syndromes tended to be female compared to patients in Israel or the Netherlands (p < 0.001).”) This would have the additional advantage of saving the reader from having to remember which database is from which country.
Results, p8: The coefficients in the regression model are very small – with the exception of ‘acuity’ in the Netherlands, and possibly age in the Netherlands, no single variable influences number of treatments by more than 1. Thus it seems misleading to claim that there are (implicitly clinically significant) differences in regression coefficients across countries.

**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.