Reviewer's report


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Reviewer: Douglas M Fleming

Reviewer's report:

You here describe the establishment of a sentinel network of emergency out of hours health care providers. This is a potentially useful adjunct to other information sources. However if others are to be persuaded to follow your example, you need:-

Major revisions

1] to provide more detail on the costs of establishing and running this service.

2] to justify the absence of diagnostic data. Your statement that diagnostic information could not be obtained because of privacy reasons is not acceptable, since you lay great store on the anonymity of data collection. Most persons would consider that if your purpose is to provide information to influence health policy and emergency management, diagnostic information is essential.

3] to review your statement about validation. At the top of page 11 you suggest that checks for missing data are very satisfactory. You lost 850 cases from one clinic; you cannot retrieve data to check for under-reporting; and you have evidence that when under pressure doctors sometimes fail to register. Your statement implying satisfaction cannot be sustained. The extent to which you can check the data is a determinate of the quality of the information system.

Minor discretionary revisions

4] Why do you report the population representativeness and the results of the study in different age bands?

5] Fig1 does not provide information on clinical consultations as implied by the text.

6] The results of contact analysis in a particular 3 month period cannot be extrapolated to a year because of seasonal variation.

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, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.