Reviewer's report

Title: Comparison of case-mix & patients' reports of outcome in Independent Sector Treatment Centres and NHS providers: prospective cohort study

Version: 1 Date: 14 January 2008

Reviewer: bernard zicat

Reviewer's report:

generally, a well researched and well presented article

i am an orthopaedic surgeon, and my expertise is more closely related to the cases of hip and knee arthroplasty, and in relation to these i have some concerns

firstly, the level of recruitment for hip and knee arthroplasty patients varies dramatically between the istc and nhs centres, and i feel this should be addressed by a description of the patients who chose not to participate, and whether their absence in the study group will have a bias on the likelihood of post operative complication or unhappy result??

secondly, the authors describe the preoperative groups as different, and state that they have made adjustment for preoperative characteristics, but no description of the adjustment process is provided

i feel this should be described, in order to allow us to assess whether this adjustment is fair, and fairly eliminates any potential bias due to selection

i would caution that the results of some operations, particularly hip and knee arthroplasty, may be poorer over a medium term, 5-10 years, and the time frame of this study would only assess for immediate postoperative complications such as infection, fracture, dislocation, etc, and i feel this should be stated in the discussion

otherwise, it is a good article, that helps to eliminate the perception of early postoperative failures in the istc's

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: 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'