Author's response to reviews

Title: Primary care physician supply and other key determinants of health care utilisation: The case of Switzerland

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Dear Sirs,

Thank you for reviewing our article entitled "Primary care physician supply and other key determinants of health care utilisation: The case of Switzerland"

According to the comments of the reviewers, we extended the article and supplied additional references.

All additions and corrections are listed on the next pages and are made visible in one of the accompanying files.

We now resubmit the article for your consideration and look forward to your thoughts and comments.

with best regards

A. Busato & B. Künzi

2 Aug 2007

Reviewer Mark F Harris

The introduction was extended with a short description of Swiss Health care including further references. Other additions in the introduction refer to the proportion of primary care consultations described in our study.

An introductive paragraph was added to the discussion, with reference to various explanatory models used to explain the relationship between availability and utilization of medical resources.

The use of the typology of communities was justified and its structure was also described. However, this classification cannot be changed as it is the framework of the Swiss Federal Statistical office. Thus an additional reference is given.

The levels of analysis are more clearly stated in the methods section and described in the paragraph describing the modeling procedures. We are, however, reluctant to put the description model of the final model in the results section as we consider this not as a result but as a methodological issue.

The term "other analysis" refers to the analysis of variance components. The text was clarified.

The fact, that we analyzed the complete data of reimbursements all primary care physicians at the expense of compulsory health insurance was stated at various positions in the text. We also clarified the respective proportions of primary care vs. ambulatory specialist care (first paragraph results section).
There is currently no theoretical description available that would explain the observed cultural differences that may affect the performance of the Swiss health system and empirical models are either lacking or remain purely descriptive. The paragraph “Determinants of utilization of primary care resources” was therefore extended in this sense. Other additions in the same paragraph refer to results related to non-Swiss citizens.

Alternative scenarios to just limiting the number of primary care providers are given, including two additional references, in the last sentence of the conclusion.

We extended the description and the significance of variance components in the paragraph describing the statistical procedures.

We also evaluated plots to document the interaction between the proportions of women and non-Swiss residents in the population. With reference to the non-Swiss residents we constructed three equally sized groups and plotted the respective incidences as a function of the female to male ratio. However, we considered the plot as not as very instructive and therefore we omitted it (see below).

Reviewer Gert P. Westert

Other recent research in Swiss ambulatory care mainly aimed at the analysis of social factors with influence on the utilization of medical resources. These projects showed that variations in the frequency of consultations were only partially related to the health and the socioeconomic status of the respective populations. Factors related to the structure of supply were not formally and
in-depth investigated in this context. This lack of evidence was the main rationale why this project was initiated by federal health authorities; furthermore, the limitations of spatial models based on administrative or political boundaries were also recognized. Therefore, we think that our current study provides additional insight into the interrelationship between the regional density of supply and utilization of ambulatory care. Further, we consider that the spatial model provided in our paper might be useful for future decisions within Swiss health care. We are, however, aware of the fact that Switzerland is a small country with a specific health system and that results from fee-for-service systems may have only limited value from an international point of view.

Our first manuscript has been edited before submission by a native American English speaker. We nevertheless submitted the revised form of the manuscript to another native American English speaker for language edition.