Reviewer's report

Title: Appropriateness of acute admission and in-patient stay for patients with long term neurological conditions

Version: 1 Date: 27 August 2008

Reviewer: Jon Glasby

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This article focuses on an important and timely issue. It is well written and I would be pleased to see it published. However, the draft as it stands will need some major revisions before acceptance.

Please note that I am not the best person to comment on the quantitative aspect of the research, so have focused on the overall approach, background literature and implications drawn.

In particular, I had 9 main comments:

1. In the background section, it is important to note that many of the studies cited are not from the UK. Some studies were also very dated and I was surprised not to see systematic reviews cited by McDonagh et al or by Glasby et al. I also understand that Andrew Worthington may have published on delayed discharge for patients with brain injury.

2. This is an area where studies adopt very different methodological approaches (as acknowledged early on) and I was surprised not to find a more detailed discussion of this (including debate around the appropriateness of expert panels and about the tendency for different professions to identify different issues from their professional perspectives)

3. I am unclear what being recruited to the study meant for patients (for example, over what period did the study take place, how many patients were admitted, what proportion took part, how was consent obtained etc?) I was also unsure what the interviews entailed or what a 'trained reviewer' meant.

4. It is a shame that the different perspectives included did not include a patient perspective (particularly in light of the authors'
desire to obtain patient specific assessment of circumstances around each admission) - previous literature has suggested that this may be best obtained from the patients themselves.

5. It is a shame that the three admissions where the panel could not agree were not included - exploring in detail why they could not agree could be even more important than the current study.

6. I'm not sure it is appropriate to consider together patients inappropriately admitted and people appropriately in hospital, but then delayed after medically fit for discharge. These seem to me to be two separate issues that require separate discussion.

7. Not considering the length of delays due to time constraints seems a fundamental limitation, but it's hard to know how to get round this.

8. I was not convinced about some of the discussion around the need for more social care - under the circumstances very few of the delays seemed to be related solely to social care.

9. Further policy background is needed around the importance of the long-term conditions agenda, national PSA targets, debates about reimbursement/delayed transfers and care closer to home.