Reviewer’s report

Title: Assessing quality of medical death certification: concordance between gold standard diagnosis and underlying cause of death in selected Mexican hospitals

Version: 2 Date: 2 May 2011

Reviewer: Kathleen Kahn

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
The question is clearly defined and of importance.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
The methods are appropriate but there may be some confusion for the reader unfamiliar with the broader PHMRC study. I suggest greater attention be given to distinguishing the two. This can be done by
a) providing a little more detail on the “general study” at the time it is first mentioned (Methods paragraph 1)
b) providing a reference for “the protocol of the PHMRC” (Methods paragraph 1: line 2 and last line)

In addition, I recommend providing a little more detail (or a reference) on the “500 test datasets (splits) from an uninformative Dirichlet distribution” for those readers unfamiliar with this (Methods, Analysis Section, middle of paragraph 4).

Please not that I am not qualified to assess this level of statistics. Unless other reviewers have done so, I recommend they be reviewed by a statistician.

3. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
The discussion is well written and structured. The conclusion succinctly and clearly distills the implications of the findings.

4. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The title is informative. The abstract is clear.

5. Is the writing acceptable?
The paper is well written. However the extensive, and (in my opinion) in several instances unnecessary use of abbreviations is distracting to the reader – despite the list of abbreviations provided. I suggest that the following abbreviations be
eliminated and replaced with the full wording: COD, DC, FD, GS, UCD

Minor Essential Revisions

Methods, paragraph 1:
Line 2: “Following the protocol of PHMRC” – can you provide some information on the criteria for selection?
Line 6: what “general study”? 
Line 14: all 36 hospitals are listed in Annex 2 – can you remove the 2 hospitals not included in this study?
Last line: please provide a reference for the PHMRC project.

Methods section title “Procedure”
Line 2: reference the protocol of the PHMRC study
Line 3: “their mortality database to identify potential gold standard cases” – whose mortality database? What criteria?

Results, paragraph 1
Line 2: permission was granted from who? Was this informed consent from respondents? Was this permission for the VA investigators?

Discussion, paragraph 2
Line 5: “per decade” is unclear. Do you mean per decade of age?
Last sentence: What is the implication of this difference with the Valencia study? Is the difference meaningful? Does it have anything to do the 500 Dirichlet splits?

Minor issues not for publication
Background, paragraph 3, line 2: replace “filling it” with “completing it”
Methods, paragraph 2, line 12: replace “enough Level 1 cases” with “sufficient Level 1 cases” Methods section title “Procedure”

Paragraph 2: “Revision of medical records” - do you mean “review of medical records”? If so, please change word in line 3 as well. “Homogenize” should be replace with “harmonise”/

Paragraph 3: replace “applied to” with “conducted with”

Discussion, paragraph 9 line 3: replace “easily to understand for physicians” with “easily understood by physicians”

References 16 and 17: Will these be updated from “manuscript in progress”?

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests