Reviewer's report

Title: A Cluster Randomized Trial to Assess the Impact of Clinical Pathways for Patients with Stroke: Results of the Clinical Pathways for Effective and Appropriate Care Study

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Reviewer: Peter Langhorne

Reviewer's report:

I read this article with interest as it addresses the important topic of the improvement of stroke patient care using clinical pathways. I found the article to be nicely written and well described and overall the weaknesses are well acknowledged. I have a number of questions and comments as follows.

1. Abstract – Results – You say that there is a “higher probability of returning to prestroke functioning” but the odds ratio shows a lower probability. I think this requires correction.

2. Methods – When was the study carried out?

3. Methods – Sample size – Can you please clarify the power calculation. Were you estimating a reduction in mortality from 17% to 8%?

4. Methods – I note they use data from the National Register. Is this information reliable? Do you have some demonstration of its reliability?

5. Statistics – I think an independent statistical review would be useful.

6. Results – Do you have any information on the characteristics of the services before the study started?

7. Results – The seven day mortality result is statistically significant by your predefined criteria.

8. Discussion – Was there any difference between the services in terms of the access to stroke unit care prior to the trial? I think this requires clarification particularly in view of the results in Table 4.

9. Discussion – It would be useful to reference the recent cluster randomised study from Australia (Middleton et al, Lancet 2011).

I hope these comments are useful.

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the
statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

None