Reviewer's report

Title: Rate of first recorded diagnosis of autism and other pervasive developmental disorders in United Kingdom general practice, 1988 to 2001

Version: 4 Date: 15 July 2004

Reviewer: Craig Newschaffer

Reviewer's report:

I will comment on the authors' responses (referring to the numbers used by Smeeth and others in their response) that I feel warrant further consideration by your editors. I was fully satisfied with those that I don't comment on here.

2) While I don't disagree that indirect rates are typically more precise than directly standardized rates, bias can indeed be introduced when comparing SIRs. This point, made in my original comment, is neither acknowledged, discussed nor rebutted in the authors' reply. The authors may prefer to present indirectly standardized rates and SIRs in the paper because of their increased precision, but I think they should have at least also looked at the patterns in the directly standardized rates to make sure that they were consistent with those from the SIRs.

7) In this comment I wasn't referring to "other diagnoses" but to the specific codes that, according to the appendix, were used to classify subjects as having a PDD diagnosis - the outcome of interest in this analysis. In early study years (Oxmis era) there were just two diagnostic codes that would lead to a subject being labeled as having a PDD dx while in later years (Read era) there were over 30 such codes. Some comment on how the switch over from the Oxmis codes to the Read codes may have affected secular trends in PDD prevalence, given the drastic change in number of PDD-related codes available, still strikes me as quite relevant to THIS paper.

Which journal?: Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an exceptionally interesting article

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

None