Reviewer's report

Title: Explaining variation in GP referral rates for X-rays for back pain

Version: Date: 24 January 2006

Reviewer: Carolyn Chew-Graham

Reviewer’s report:

REVIEWER'S COMMENTS FOR AUTHORS

Explaining variation in GP referral rates for X-rays for back pain

Abstract:
The abstract adequately outlines the paper. The number of interviews should be stated.

Background:
This adequately explains the background to the study and the research questions.
The literature review, however, is out of date and does not cite the more recent work about
decision-making in the consultation, not about current policy drivers in the NHS, and in changes
affecting primary care in particular (for example Practice-Based Commissioning).
The authors need to separate the literature of acute back pain as a simple biomechanical problem
from that of CLBP which is a more complex biopsychosocial problem to be dealt with in the
consultation and in the long-term doctor-patient relationship.

Methods:
The data was collected in 2000 – six years ago, and so the usefulness of the data in a rapidly
changing NHS context has to be questioned.
The authors do not state how accurate the data – used to identify high and low referrers - from their
local hospitals are (my experience is that such data are not at all accurate).
The methods section is adequately described, in particular the process of analysis is detailed.

Results:
The results are presented clearly and the presentation of convergent and divergent themes original
and interesting. The data is presented in a rather descriptive manner, with little in-depth analysis, for
example, around maintaining the doctor-patient relationship (and linking with the literature), or
patient-centredness.

Discussion:
The discussion adequately summarises the Results section, but it is limited and needs to take
account of the current policy drivers in teh NHS and the changing face of primary care, particularly
with GPs no longer being the sole gate-keeper to investigations such as LSX.

I hope the authors find these comments helpful.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can
be reached)
The revisions suggested above should be completed [ updated and expanded lit rv, more analysis of
Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Abstract - add number of interviews

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.