Reviewer's report

Title: The uptake and effect of a mailed decision aid on colon cancer screening: a pilot controlled trial

Version: 1 Date: 8 August 2007

Reviewer: Jane Kim

Reviewer's report:

General

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1. "Description of Intervention" (page 7): What were the system changes that allowed patients to access screening tests without a provider visit? Standing orders, a protocol, nursing support? A description of the system changes should be included.

2. In "Results-primary outcomes" (p.10), did any of those who were screened also complete the intervention? If not, is it possible to say that the intervention was responsible for the increase in screening, or could it be due to other factors? This should be discussed in the Limitations section.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. typo page 9: “like” should be “liked”

2. In “Results-response to mailings” (p. 10), it says that 137 patients were in the intervention group. In other sections of the manuscript, the number of intervention patients is also 137. Table 2, however, indicates that there were 144 intervention patients. Which is correct?

3. Also in “Results-response to mailings” (p. 10), the percent from whom there was no response seems that it should be 64%, not 58% when comparing with Figure 1, because 64% includes the 9 that were returned as undeliverable.

4. In “Secondary outcomes-responses to mailed survey” (p.11), what were the scores on the Likert scales for interest and intent described in Methods? What were the values assigned to the numbers on the Likert scale? Also, what was the acceptability of the intervention, also a question that was asked according to the Secondary outcomes section of the Methods?
Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. Under “Patient Ascertainment” (page 5), why is barium enema not included in the database that tracks colorectal cancer screening test results? Is it because this modality is not used at this institution for screening, or is there another reason?

2. Do you have any reasons for the low uptake of the intervention (based on the phone interviews, or other) that you can discuss?

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 importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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