Reviewer's report

Title: Should patients be activated to request evidence-based medicine? : a qualitative study of providers’ responses to the VA Project to Implement Diuretics (VAPID)

Version: 1 Date: 19 March 2009

Reviewer: Derjung Tarn

Reviewer's report:

This is a well-written article that provides interesting information on provider attitudes toward a patient activation strategy in which hypertensive patients received incentives and letters to discuss the use of thiazide diuretics with their providers. The study demonstrates that the intervention strategy was an effective reminder to consider prescribing a thiazide, and was acceptable to the providers interviewed at the end of the study. Data on patient views about initiating discussions with their providers would have greatly enhanced the study.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1) The authors present some interesting findings, but may consider tempering some of their conclusions. The major limitation of the study is the fact that only half of the providers with patients in the study were interviewed. The authors acknowledge this limitation in the Discussion section, and state that these providers may have had more negative views of the study. In light of this, it seems that the conclusion that the intervention was “highly acceptable” to providers may be overstated.

2) Similarly, the authors conclude that the patient-activation intervention “strengthens the provider-patient interaction,” but there is no evidence of this in the manuscript. Data on positive physician feelings about their relationship with the patient were not presented, though some of the providers interviewed expressed some concern that the intervention might undermine provider trust. While the provider-patient interaction could have been strengthened by the interaction, it also is difficult to draw this conclusion without knowing the patient’s viewpoint. If the authors want to discuss the relationship between patient requests and satisfaction with the visit, they might consider citing some of Kravitz RL et al’s work on request fulfillment.

3) In the Data Analysis section, the authors state that “Initial analysis of the reviewed transcripts was conducted by three study team members.” Did the three study team members review all of the transcripts or just a subset of them? If just a subset, how were those transcripts chosen and how many were there? The authors also state that the “first set of completed interviews was also independently coded for content themes.” This is somewhat unclear. Did the authors pick out a set of interviews to code, and if so, how many did each author...
review independently?

- Minor Essential Revisions

1) In the Data Analysis section, the authors might consider explaining the process of “matrix coding” in more detail.

- Discretionary Revisions

1) Is there information on the specialties of providers who chose not to participate in the study? This probably is beyond the scope of the study, but it would be interesting to see if the rates of discussion / prescriptions varied among those interviewed and those who were not.

2) Did the providers receive an incentive to participate in the interviews?

3) Did the authors reach saturation in their coding process?

**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.