Reviewer’s report

Title: A review of the use of health examination data from the Health Survey for England in government policy

Version: 1 Date: 7 November 2013

Reviewer: Antje Goesswald

Reviewer’s report:

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The submitted manuscript is very interesting and to my knowledge the first effort to try to analyze systematically, how data from examination surveys have been used for policy makers in UK.

In times of household restrictions in all European countries the justification for the costly personal examination of participants in population based surveys has to be very precise. This manuscript produces important arguments for the necessity and usefulness of selected measurements.

2. n.a.

3. Discussion is balanced and conclusions are supported by sufficient citations of literature.

4. Method of interviewing senior members of staff …. and searching systematically for policy documents appears to be appropriate and is well described.

5. The method of interviewing senior staff members might lead especially to the positive results achieved on the basis of HSE examination data. Are there any examples of over- or underestimations of prevalence due to methodological problems i.e. in laboratory – methods misleading the public or politics?

6. Some comments on the details of the writing are listed below.

Background:

It should be pointed out whether there is an analysis of the use of examination data in the different stages of policy making in the UK to date.

And if not this circumstance should be mentioned here, not at the end of the article.

Furthermore the specific value of examination data should be explained. Measurements of blood pressure, height, weight and waist circumference, and blood and urine samples are essential to identify public health relevant health indicators: i.e. hypertension, obesity, diabetes, chronic kidney disease.

Other survey methods such as interviews on self reported diagnosis or measures
are not reliable for prevalence estimation.

Results:

Page 7: “… The kidney team at the Department of Health were able to commit funding…..”

It would be interesting to know, when the examination will take place and when the data are planned to be available.

Page 9: “….Studies using HSE data from 1998, 2003 and 2006…..awareness of HT rose in women from 64 %….. in 2003 ….to 66 % in 2006, but changed little in men (from 60 to 62%)”

The difference is the same in men and women + 2 %.

Please correct this.

Are there data available from 1998?

Page 10: “Other targets ..... are shown in table 2”.

Further examples of targets should be named here.

Page 11: Further fields where data have been used in policy evaluation should be named here.

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.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.

I am funded by the German Ministry of Health and am engaged in the realisation of Health Examination Surveys in Germany.