Reviewer's report

Title: Feasibility of automated pre-screening for lifestyle and behavioral health risk factors in primary care

Version: 1 Date: 10 July 2015

Reviewer: Maria Wolters

Reviewer's report:

The authors present a very interesting approach to pre-screening patients using IVR that covers many relevant areas of General Practice. They find that the percentage of symptoms reported is generally consistent with data from relevant epidemiological studies, which is a good sign. The study is a very welcome contribution to the evidence base.

Spelling mistakes:

p. 7 line 128 Veterans Health Administration

Discretionary revisions:

You say that your screening method is innovative. IVR screening is in fact quite common, at least in research or when screening for particular conditions - what is new is your integration into primary care.


I also find your use of single item screens interesting.

You argue that single item screens are used because brevity is essential in General Practice. However, I wonder how the results of your screen will be used in actual practice. Would physicians take the results at face value? How do physicians interpret the output of the questionnaire? Mood problems in particular seem to be flagged far too much. Relaxing the single item constraint to encompass 1-2 items per condition seems sensible. A somewhat higher specificity would be good, because otherwise, you will get alert fatigue in the physicians.

Finally, I would disagree with your assumption that response rates will be higher, should IVR be rolled out routinely as a pre screen. I would instead expect to see them drop, because you won't have the context of a study that gets people interested and motivated to answer their phones. But you will still have cognitive
and hearing impairments, lack of mobile numbers, and also reluctance to pick up the phone if the practice routinely withholds its number. You are competing with an army of nuisance callers.

Minor points:
- As a non-native speaker of English, I find the use of "endorsed the item" to state that people replied "yes" or reported a symptom a bit strange, because endorsement to me is a positive term.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests