Reviewer’s report

Title: Cross-sectional study in an out-of-hours primary care centre in northwestern Germany - patient characteristics and the urgency of their treatment

Version: 0 Date: 04 Jul 2018

Reviewer: Hogne Sandvik

Reviewer's report:

The paper addresses an important aspect of out-of-hours practice, namely non-urgent visits. It is often claimed that emergency departments and out-of-hours services are crowded by patients who could have waited for an appointment with their regular general practitioner the day after.

The paper is generally well written, but there are some language errors, and I suggest professional help with language editing.

The title should reflect the main theme of the study, reasons for encounter and urgency. Avoid questions, but include study design.

According to Background (Abstract), urgency was evaluated both by patients and physicians, but I can find no trace of the patients' view on urgency in the paper. It would have been very interesting to analyze the degree of agreement between patients and physicians on this aspect. Were patients asked about alternatives - e.g. did they consider waiting for an appointment with their regular GP?

Payment out-of-pocket may influence help seeking behavior. Please explain if/how much patients who consult the OOHC center have to pay.

I don't understand the phrase 'sex and primary care' (page 4, line 100)

The opening hours of the OOHC center is quite short. If hospitals and emergency rescue services are for life-threatening conditions, where do patients with less serious conditions go out-of-hours when the OOHC center is closed (i.e. when they call 116117)?

As this material is a sample, means and proportions should be given with a confidence interval. Also, you should consider including a statistical test when comparing means or proportions.

The age distribution of the patients in your material was surprising. I would have expected more children and more elderly patients. The total number of patients was quite low considering the size of the catchment area. Are there other OOH alternatives in your area?

I don't understand the phrase 'instead of diagnoses, consultation occasions are coded' (page 6, line 129)
In the Discussion (page 9, lines 223, 225) you say that 50.1% of patients were in the age group 18-39 years, while in Results it is 54.9%.

You claim that younger patients are more often frequent attenders in OOHC (page 9, lines 226-227). I doubt this is correct, see Figure 1 in this paper: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-018-3310-8

Page 12, line 280: 'physicians' - do you mean general practitioners?

You have many German references. Please include English translation in brackets.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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