Reviewer's report

Title: Impact of referral templates on the quality of referral from primary to secondary care. A cluster randomized trial

Version: 1 Date: 1 December 2014

Reviewer: Marianne Storm

Reviewer's report:

The aim of the study is to investigate whether the distribution of a referral template will lead to improved quality of referrals.

An overall comment is that the paper has improved following recommendations for major compulsory revision.

I have the following comments:

Introduction:
Page 4-5 line 116-119. There is a mix between the hypothesis in the main project and the hypothesis in the current study. It would improve clarity to focus only on the hypothesis in the current study. Could you be more specific on factors that can affect quality of referrals? More specific hypothesis?

A section about the Norwegian health care system has been included in the introduction. This would fit better in the methods section with the heading “study setting”

Page 8 line 198-200. The sentence is not clear. Why was the project period 2.5 years when the template was in use until November 2014?

Page 9: line 236-240. These sentences are still not quite clear. What was the GP surgery average score value?

Page 12-13 the results section:

I would prefer some more elaboration on the results presented in figure 2 illustrating the average referral scores. In particular the outliers. There seem to be several for the diagnostic group dyspepsia? Figure 2 is also very difficult to
Page 14: Discussion line 358-359:
This again is supported in the current literature on the topic (44). What is the current literature on the topic? Please specify.

Page 16: Discussion:
It is pointed at that the quality of the referrals varied between the four clinical areas. I think it would be useful with more elaboration on theses interesting result (have similar results been reported in earlier research?) and what the potential consequences this could have for the patients in the different diagnostic groups.

In the discussion, it would be useful to bring some more attention to the difficulties experienced with the uptake of the interventions and how these could have been addressed. What are reported barriers to uptake of interventions in clinical practice? How would electronic pop-ups be useful?

The last paragraph page 17: it is not clear whether the paragraph relate to the current study or the overall project.

minor essential revisions

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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'