Reviewer's report

Title: A cross-sectional study assessing the association between online ratings and structural and quality of care measures: results from two German physician-rating websites

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Reviewer: Guodong Gao

Reviewer's report:

Review: A cross-sectional study assessing the association between online ratings and structural and quality of care measures: results from two German physician-rating websites

This paper takes on an important question: whether patients should rely on the online ratings to make physician choice. Using a sample of 65 physician practice, the authors examine the correlation between online ratings from two German websites and the clinical quality measures.

Overall, the authors are working on a worthy research agenda. I agree with the authors that there exists a great need for empirical evidence on the value of online ratings in enlightening doctor choice. This paper has the potential to make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the value of online doctor ratings.

Major Compulsory Revisions

My major concern is the relatively small sample size, which casts doubt on the generality of the findings. The study is based on 65*1.77 = 115 doctors, all from one provider network. It is not clear how applicable of the findings here to the greater physician population. In addition, some quality measures such as Asthma has only 26 observations. I wonder whether the authors have enough statistical power to draw conclusions. This issue should be addressed.

Minor Essential Revisions

Qualitatively speaking, the findings are not that different from Greaves et al (2012), which is based on a much bigger sample of physicians. So the authors need to provide more convincing evidence on their new contributions. The authors might want to reflect the current body of knowledge on the study of how online ratings are associated with doctor quality. For example, Gao et al (2012) examines whether the online ratings are associated with individual doctor quality like board certification, education background, and years of experience, as well as malpractice law suits. A more recent paper published in JAMA Internal Medicine links online ratings with physician test scores.

The paper could provide more details on how the quality measures are constructed. There are some valuable information in Table 1, but they are not reflected in the content.

The language can be further polished.

Discretionary Revisions
The authors could provide more discussions by comparing their findings with those using UK and USA data.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

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

Declaration of competing interests:

No