Author’s response to reviews

Title: Development and testing of the KERNset: an instrument to assess the quality of telephone triage in out-of-hours primary care services

Authors:

Marleen Smits (marleen.smits@radboudumc.nl)

Ellen Keizer (ellen.keizer@radboudumc.nl)

Paul Ram (paul.ram@maastrichtuniversity.nl)

Paul Giesen (paul.giesen@radboudumc.nl)

Version: 2 Date: 27 Oct 2017

Author’s response to reviews:

We thank the editor and reviewers for their efforts and valuable comments.

1) Molly Jeffery (Reviewer 1): My questions were adequately addressed. I do recommend rewording of the item "Asks the patient on the phone." It is still not clear to me what that means. Asks whether the triagist is speaking to the patient vs. some other person? Asks to speak to the patient? Asks the patient to check his/her vital signs?

Authors:

We have changed it into “Asks to speak to the patient” as this is exactly what the item means.

2) Katie Gallacher (Reviewer 2): I feel the the authors have addressed most of the comments made and congratulate them. However, I think it is still unclear how this new measure compares to already existing measures, and a paragraph on this in the discussion is needed. This would justify the need for a new measure (or 'core set of items'). As the KERNset consists of items from other measures, I would also recommend that the authors provide references to the 13 existing measures that they took the items from, and explain how these measures were identified from the literature. Was there a systematic review of current measures? This would help the reader place the KERNset in context.

Authors:

Our aim was not to make a new instrument, but to determine which items out of all instruments are most important and should be included in all (existing) instruments. In the introduction
section we state: “This core set should be incorporated into existing measurement instruments or can be used as a separate instrument”.

The justification for a core set of items was given in the introduction section, page 6, lines 92-102: “In the Netherlands, different instruments have been used to assess the quality of telephone triage at GP cooperatives. The instruments focus mainly on communicational aspects and less on the medical quality of the triage decisions. Moreover, GP cooperatives use different procedures for sampling and rating. The quality of the triage conversations, expressed as the percentage of the maximum score, shows large variation in the Dutch literature, from 35% to 75%.[4,13] Part of this variation can be explained by differences in measurement instruments and measurement procedures. For adequate benchmarking, uniformity in measurement procedures and instruments is needed.”

We also added to the discussion section, page 18, lines 339-343: “Different instruments have been used for assessing the quality of telephone triage in GP cooperatives. These instruments focussed mainly on communicational aspects, and less on the medical quality of triage decisions. Moreover, because of the diversity in instruments, benchmarking between organisations was not possible. Our objective was not to create a new instrument, but we developed a minimum set of 24 items to be included in existing instruments to assess the quality of telephone triage”

We did not perform a systematic review of current measures, but asked all GP cooperatives if they were willing to share their instruments with us. We added to the methods section, page 6, line 112: “A national survey among representatives of all 49 umbrella organisations of GP cooperatives in the Netherlands was performed to determine the most important aspects of telephone triage and to collect existing measurement instruments,…”

We cannot provide references to the 13 existing measurements because there are no publications describing them. A substantial part of the instruments were adapted from the HAAK scoring instrument which has been used in a study by Derkx. We added to the methods section, page 7, lines 116-117: “We gathered 13 measurement instruments, of which a substantial part were adapted versions of the HAAK-scoring instrument [13].