Reviewer’s report

Title: A data infrastructure for the assessment of health care performance: lessons from the BRIDGE-Health project

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Reviewer: Peter Achterberg

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A good overview of some major efforts in international comparative HSPA research with a focus on data related issues and requirements for the future.

Although the importance of investigating the variability of Healthcare outcomes among different settings is recognized the paper could do with some more indications of the specific importance over the international dimension of such comparisons over, for instance, performance comparisons between hospitals in one region.

The storyline is interesting but rather elaborate on the one hand, but logical and fluent on the other.

However, at a certain moment (P7, 29-30) the tekst says: ....the case study will use......At this point a reader gets the impression that he or she is reading a research proposal in stead of an essay on research outcomes. This may need some rewriting or clarification...

As the research and data addressed in this paper involved mainly (only?) hospital data some reference should be made, e.g. in the discussion (and in the introduction as well) that the outcomes and conclusions of this research only cover and refer to a theoretically small part of a full European health information system. A full system will need to cover all Healthcare settings as well as information on health status, determinants of health and contextual information involving data from other sources, i.e. from surveys and/or statistical sources (demographic and mortality data, economic Healthcare data), which by linking to the data discussed here could further enrich this data, but might also put more and different restraints or prerequisites on the ideal data models as proposed here.

This does not contradict with the conclusions in this paper, but sets a much broader perspective, when talking about health information systems.

Another issue not discussed in much detail is the fact that the perspective of this paper is mainly research oriented, i.e. using data to answer specific complex questions on quality, accessibility and effectiveness of care. A major question remains on how to regularly repeat this type of data collection and analysis in a cost-effective way, that would allow for producing regular indicators for monitoring and quality assessment at the national and regional and possibly institutional (hospital) level. This poses the question of whether our largely different and constantly changing
national health care systems in the EU would allow for such enormous repeated data efforts to produce reliable and useful outcomes for policy makers at all these levels.

Who would pay and who would get the benefits?

Or will it be enough to have a common language, common standards and procedures and a common conceptual framework and then be able to draw the full fruit of international comparisons, benchmarks for drawing tailor made conclusions for national and regional policy makers?

Another question is how to get countries and/or professional groups and institutions (hospitals) to implement the needed additional common standards and operating procedures to be able to release their data timely and in a legally accepted and privacy protected way into central databases. This will not happen unless the actual data providers will see a real benefit for themselves.

Regionality (NUTS or other levels) is another problem to concern as certain Healthcare types are organised at different levels in different countries where the NUTS-level division is unfortunately not useful. How to solve these types of problems is a question for futher research, I think.

Some of the above issues are in part addressed in P 9 and 10, where important conclusions and discussion issues are listed in a long list.

Some of these conclusions may be even more valuable when added to the abstract and the long list of these conclusions may need some structuring in terms of new potential identified and pittfalls still to tackle (or some other logical set of categories).

Some structuring and focusing of messages and conclusions will enhance the readability for less technically schooled readers, who still need to be convinced of the importance is this type of research.

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