Reviewer’s report

Title: A pilot study of the duration of GP consultations in Ireland

Version: 0 Date: 03 Sep 2019

Reviewer: Natasha Noble

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript which examines the feasibility of collecting objective data on the duration of GP consultations in Ireland. The study outlines a simple, easily accessible, low cost means of obtaining such data, and as such is a valuable addition to the literature on the provision of primary care.

I have just a few concerns about the manuscript which I would like to see addressed. These include:

- How applicable are the methods/results from the Socrates software when this is only used by 17% of GPs? I know this is briefly mentioned, but I would be concerned to know how/if the data extraction tool applies in the same way to other software systems?
- How were clerical staff opening the patient files excluded?
- Validation exercise: Upon first reading I thought that the consult duration data came from the 2 week period when GPs were asked to make sure they opened and closed records. But then reading the results it looks like data was from 2010. Reporting of the results of validation are also not clear- they mention the intervention for diabetes period, which is not explained. What was the comparison period? I think this is quite important, as the results obviously rely on the GP opening and closing the record at beginning and end of the consult. This needs to be better explained.

I have a few other minor comments/suggestions:

Abstract:
Spell out GP on first use
Not sure that the paper also demonstrates "how such information can be used to inform the delivery of primary care" as stated in abstract. I would remove this from the twin aims, and just state in the conclusions that potential uses of the information are also discussed.

Intro:
Is there also lack of training/recruitment of new GPs in Ireland contributing to smaller workforce?
‘…UK the average consultation durations' should be duration?
Estimates of GP consultation durations in Ireland are based on recall- add GP recall.
'Practices characteristic' should be Practice characteristics?

Methods:
Validation exercise: I think this needs to be clarified or rephrased. The 2 week period was just for
validation of the records from 2010? Maybe a separate heading in the methods section to talk about validation after the other sections.

Is there any more detail about the 3 practices that agreed to participate- eg rural vs urban, lower vs higher SES etc? ie some indication of how representative the 3 practices were?

Results
Table 1: Age add yrs; '…in all practice' should be 'practices'. For consistency add '. ' For no. of practice nurses

Results of validation are not clearly reported. What was the comparison period? The 'intervention for diabetes' is not part of this study and is not explained elsewhere, so it's not clear to use this as the comparison period.

Discussion
Limitations
I don't think the section about additional work done by GPs but not captured in the consult duration is needed- the study was not trying to say that this is all the time GPs spend working.

Other comments
Overall there is a bit of a mix of past and present tense used throughout the paper. Eg "The duration of consultation was only included when the patients file is accessed for a clinical consultation with a GP. This should be made consistent throughout the paper- I think past tense is more appropriate.

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An article of importance in its field

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

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