Reviewer’s report

Title: Detecting depressive and anxiety disorders in distressed patients in primary care; comparative diagnostic accuracy of the Four-Dimensional Symptom Questionnaire (4DSQ) and the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS)

Version: 1 Date: 4 May 2009

Reviewer: Enric Aragonès

Reviewer’s report:

Major Compulsory Revisions

In this article, the authors try to study the diagnostic performance of two different questionnaires: the HADS, a classic questionnaire with a well established usefulness; and the 4DSQ, a new instrument designed by the authors of the article. They use as gold standard the DSM-IV diagnoses obtained with the CIDI.

The main limitation of this paper is the sample of patients in which the functioning of the questionnaires is studied. The sample was recruited for the purposes of a clinical trial on a psychosocial intervention in distressed patients, with inclusion and exclusion criteria probably adequate for the aims of the clinical trial but inadequate for the aims of this manuscript, because they limit very much the external validity and the utility of the results reported. For example: in a study on a diagnostic test, the exclusion of the analysis of those patients who, in opinion of the doctor, suffer the studied disorder/s is difficult to understand.

The patients are highly selected and the extrapolation of the results obtained to the clinical practice is very difficult. This shortcoming is widely explained and argued by the authors in the Discussion though, in opinion of this reviewer, the recognition of this fault does not redeem it.

Minor Essential Revisions

There is an extensive explanation of the principal features of the studied questionnaires but the authors must indicate if they are self-reported or administered by an interviewer.

We can see the specific diagnoses considered in this paper in the table 1, but we would want to see these diagnoses also in the text of the Methods section.

Authors must describe the number, training and expertise of the persons executing the “gold standard” (CIDI)

Authors must describe more accurately the procedure of the study: the HADS and the 4DSQ are administered before or after the CIDI? Which is the time interval between the questionnaires and the reference test? Are the CIDI interviewer blinded to the results of the questionnaires? (and, can be guaranteed
that the reading of the questionnaires is independently from the criterion of reference (CIDI)?

What means 7+: > 7, or # 7?

In the row of titles of the table 3 we can see the acronym 4DKL (is it the Dutch name of the questionnaire?)

In the table 3 we can see different values of sensibility, specificity ... for the same cut-point (see 19+, and 22+)

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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'