Reviewer's report

Title: Doctors telling stories about sick-listing - a narrative analysis of case reports

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Reviewer: Mark Gabbay

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This is a novel paper, but I suspect may be of limited interest, as it is specialised in focus, although using an interesting methodological design.

The authors have sampled (non-randomly) course participant narrative reports of difficult cases, and used a narrative analysis to develop thematic categories of content etc. then verified this against a further sample. The approach is sound, and the paper clear, although I think the authors mean angles, not angels - unless this is a theological theme.

It's not clear to what extent these findings are thought to reflect common concerns of practitioners considering difficult consultations in this topic are, nor how the findings might be applied clinically or in training more widely. I suspect this is due to the limited dataset and thus the potential to infer much beyond the content considered.

The paper does provide an interesting approach to the use of the narrative analysis method, and perhaps the authors could consider this aspect of their work more - how this approach could be used to understand difficult consultations more widely for both research and educational approaches, but this would need to link to a more thorough consideration of limitations e.g. sampling, bias, inter-reporter variability in willingness to disclose, writing style, commitment to the process etc.

Although the language could benefit from little native-speaker fine tuning, the arguments and content are well presented and easy to follow mostly. However it could be argued that the data may be less robust and representative of the actual issues in difficult consultations - as they are a proxy report, subject to recall bias- and a variety of 'translations'. Thus the paper whilst interesting and novel has more generalisability limits than perhaps conceded by the authors, and this further limits it's likely impact. However it is thorough in it's use of the narrative approach and analysis, and does mark an interesting starting point for future work. The main reflection thus should be in the discussion section, considering the limitations outlined above, and further consideration therefore of what this paper adds to knowledge, as well as something about how it extends the literature on potential uses for the narrative methodology.