Reviewer's report

Title: To screen or not to screen for peripheral arterial disease in the oldest old in primary health care: a cross-sectional analysis from the BELFRAIL study

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Reviewer: Frances Mair

Reviewer's report:

This is a useful paper relating to a common problem and addresses the issue of PAD in relation to older people (those over 80yrs) who are so often excluded from studies. It is clearly written and includes a clear acknowledgement of the study limitations. My view is that this paper should be accepted for publication but I have made a number of comments below.

Major compulsory revisions

I'm afraid I have problems with the term: "the oldest old". I think that wherever this term is used...eg title of paper, abstract, text of paper that it should be amended so that it is clear what is meant. e.g. those over 80yrs or similar... The term is ambiguous and should not be used.

In the abstract the authors state that: "A general practitioner (GP) centre, located in Hoeilaart, Belgium, recruited 239 participants." It is important to add details about participant selection at this point. So what were the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participants? The authors then go on to say that a researcher performed questionnaires with patients. But what questionnaires were used. The methods section of the abstract should contain such basic details.

Within the methods section I think it would be helpful to address GP training to measure ABI...was there testing to check inter-rater reliability....if not should this be a limitation?

I would also be interested to know what the researchers did with those individuals identified as having PAD?

The discussion section makes no mention of existing guidelines in relation to PAD screening e.g. Guideline Title. Screening for peripheral arterial disease.


It would be helpful if the authors could interpret their findings in relation to this literature. At present I feel this is a bit of a gap.

Generally the authors have been very measured in their claims...for eg stating that screening should be considered in the future if beneficial treatments are
discovered. However, at one point in the discussion they say, "Considering the high prevalence of low ABI in the aged population, the asymptomatic early stages and the simple method of determining ABI, a screening program for PAD in the elderly should be considered." I think this comment needs to be removed or modified because the results from this study do not lead to one drawing this conclusion. The study shows that if you measure ABI you will detect lots of PAD in the elderly. However, as the authors acknowledge elsewhere one needs to have a worthwhile treatment before one can recommend screening. So this suggestion in the discussion is unwarranted and needs to be removed or modified.

Minor essential revisions
When using abbreviations for the first time (e.g. LAPAQ score) in abstract please write out in full on the first occasion.

INTRODUCTION: claudicatio intermittens should be intermittent claudication.

Reference 13 has a spelling error: assesing instead of assessing.

The authors have placed details of the study limitations at the very end of the paper in the conclusions section. I think this would be better placed earlier within the discussion section.

To conclude there are a few key things that the authors need to do before this paper can be accepted but I think they should all be relatively easy for them to address and should not take long. I look forward to hearing about the results from their larger cohort study which sounds extremely interesting and worthwhile.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests