Reviewer's report

**Title:** Impact of psychosomatic co-morbidity on health care utilisation in German general practices

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 21 April 2011

**Reviewer:** Sarah L Alderson

**Reviewer's report:**

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   Yes - it is easy to understand what the paper is about.
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   Mostly - see comments below.
3. Are the data sound?
   Yes, I cannot see any problem with the data.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   Yes.
5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   Mostly - but see comments below for revisions needed.
6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   Some limitations are mentionned but are not fully explored.
7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
   Yes, references are acceptable and previous work in the same area described.
8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   Mostly - comments made below.
9. Is the writing acceptable?
   Yes

**Major Compulsory Revisions**

The measures area states that the PHQ was used to estimate the validity of the coded diagnoses. I am unsure how this can be used for this purpose as the PHQ assesses current symptoms. The coded diagnoses may contain past diagnoses that the patient is not suffering from now or for diseases that are currently being treated and therefore not symptomatic. Further detail is needed on how the PHQ was used for validity and whether the disease codes analysed included past diagnoses which may be on the permanent record.
In the results the participants are compared to non-participants and found to be younger. This is likely to have an impact on the results as morbidity increases with age and it would be expected that there would be an increase in somatic diagnoses. There is no further mention of this in the results, or in the discussion and is a limitation of the study.

Minor Essential Revisions
The abstract mentions the PHQ being assessed on all participants but is not mentioned in the abstract results.

No information on the type of practices recruited for the study is mentioned which may influence results. For example, population age, deprivation scores, size of practice.

Discretionary Revisions
In the discussion, the high rate of practice contacts was compared with the US, UK and Netherlands and thought to be different as health care access is free, however, it is also free in the UK.

In the introduction, reference is made to previous studies of health care use in countries with limited access, however no comparison is made in the discussion to the results found in this study.

Title could make clear that healthcare access in Germany is unlimited.

In the analysis section, a typical German case-mix is mentioned, but there is no description or reference for this statement.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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.