Reviewer's report

Title: "A powerful intervention: GPs' use of sickness certification in depression"

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Reviewer: Mark Gabbay

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting and important paper as this is new evidence in a very under-researched area. The methods are sound, the results presented in a logical way and relevant to practice and academia.

The references are inconsistent in style and reference 1 is repeated as reference 11 (and cited as both) Abstract Brief, clear and accurate summary of key points

Introduction
Summarises the field well. There are a few relevant publications that might have been referred to, but the key ones are here (but sort out the references see above). The 1st sentence of the 4th paragraph on page 3 (final intro para) is unclear and needs revising.

Methods
The approach is sound, perhaps a bit more background about how the topic guide was developed would be helpful

Results
The themes are relevant and relate to the quotes used. There is no mention of negotiating sicknotes with patients or collecting more relevant information to inform discussions and decisions- were there data on this? Was there any apparent difference between male and female GPs attitudes and practice (see Shiels C, Gabbay M The influence of GP and Patient gender interaction on the duration of certified sickness absence Family Practice 2006;23(2):246-252)

Discussion
More could be made of the apparent relative readiness to give time off work as therapeutic rather than recommending continuing to work- were there any data on the relationship between severity, co-morbidity, complicating factors etc and this decision?
More could be made of the importance of the potential of the shifting emphasis intended by the introduction of the FitNote to this process and GP opinions and practice? I realise this would be speculative.

The authors might like to have a look at another DWP research monograph by Hiscock et al where GPs in England were interviewed about providing evidence about sickness:

References and citations
1 and 11 are the same reference. The style and layout of the references are inconsistent, the journal abbreviations unusual, and style inconsistent.