Reviewer's report

Title: Quality of sickness certification in primary health care: a retrospective database study

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Reviewer: Ueli Bollag

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Sickness certification has received a great amount of interest in Sweden compared to other European countries, and Swedish researchers must get credit for their incessant endeavours to assessing the act of certification by doctors/general practitioners with the aim of improving its quality.

The actual manuscript however is much more a report than a study. Foremost, I cannot find the question(s) that the authors want to answer. I surmise that such a question might be posed in the following way: "The aim of the study was to assess whether the numerous initiatives taken between 2004 and 2009 have resulted in an improvement of sickness certification by GPs." It is not stated clearly on which basis the seven quality parameters were chosen as outcome measures. Moreover, I do not see any discriminatory difference between quality parameter 6 and 7 (complete information / minimum amount of information)

Methods: "21 of 200 PHCCs who could comply with a set of criteria were included" - there must be an inherent bias in such sampling. While I am not in a measure to comment on the analysis of the data infallibly I wonder whether the analysis of the descriptive data is not reflecting overkilling.

Results/ Discussion: The two sections are not clearly delimited. There is a lot of repetition. The discussion is not well structured in that facts (results) and subjective interpretations by the authors are mixed up. There is an ongoing comparison and struggle between studies by other Swedish authors (Ref 3 and 10) and the present one as if there was an argument between the two groups.

If the main strength of this study was the sampling technique (see first sentence in the method's section), but that data retrieved from EPRs can sometimes be of low quality (as the autors state at the end), then the reader must be confused.

Alltogether, I find that this report is not enough succinct. It needs to be tightened considerably and the discussion must be overhauled.

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

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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.