Reviewer’s report

Title: Antibiotics for coughing in general practice: a questionnaire study to quantify and condense the reasons for prescribing

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Reviewer: Dr Bruce Arroll

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept without revision

Re review of paper by Coenen S et al Antibiotics for coughing in general practice: a questionnaire study to quantify and condense the reasons for prescribing by Bruce Arroll

Comments. The participating GPs are unlikely to be representative of Flemish general practitioners as they had been willing to take part in previous studies. The response rate of 59.5% is relatively low for such a group. It is not clear why two questionnaires were sent rather than one in two parts. For general practitioners it could be rewritten in a more readable format. The average clinician will not be interested in table 1, 2 and 3. That could be added as an appendix or offered by email to those who were interested. The authors say that non medical reasons were responsible to a lesser extent than medical reasons and this should be highlighted more clearly in the discussion. In many ways this study is not telling us anything more than has been shown in other studies although it is nice to quantify such issues. It is not clear how the results will inform an educational intervention trial. It is well known that non medical factors influence prescribing but can this be changed in an intervention trial. There is at least one qualitative study on this issue Butler CC et al BMJ 1998;317:637-42 which found that there were both medical and non medical reasons for prescribing. This study is referenced in this paper One option would be to recommend delayed prescriptions as there has been a number of studies showing that these are reasonable methods of reducing antibiotic consumption and reduces further treatment seeking. The paper by Dowell J et al Br J Gen Pract 2001;51:200-5 deals with delayed prescriptions for patients who have had a cough for one week. This would be an important addition to the references in this paper. The authors need to make more of what they intend to do the change behaviour as a result of their study.

There are a couple of minor points. The last sentence in the analysis section seems to have been left over from an early revision of the paper. Also I am not sure if there is any consensus or evidence as to post nasal drip is a cause of cough. There are no labels for the two figures in the paper.

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests.
This paper would be of interest to those in academic general practice with an interest in respiratory tract infections

**Competing interests:**

None declared.