Author's response to reviews

Title: Chronic non-specific abdominal complaints in general practice: a prospective study on management, patient health status and course of complaints

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Version 4, October 2005-11-08
Chronic non-specific abdominal complaints in general practice: a prospective study on management, patient health status and course of complaints.

Major Revisions:

1. The reviewer is correct in assuming that we included patients with - already at inclusion - chronic abdominal complaints. The general practitioner was responsible to recruit patient with chronic conditions. The three groups of patients the reviewer mentions come from the instructions for the GP. If patients fulfil these criteria he can add this problem to their problem list, from which we as the University investigators could invite the patients to join our study. As this process was done at the discretion of the attending general practitioner, we are not able to reproduce these groups. We cannot say whether the course of complaints differs between these groups. So our results are applicable only to already chronic disorders, as is expressed in the title of the manuscript. We made, as you suggested, some additions to the abstract, discussion and conclusion sections.

2. Selection bias of responders: as mentioned in the discussion we found evidence of selection bias when looking at the 47% of responders for the base line questionnaire. We did not do a second non-responder analysis for the 18 months questionnaire, but a similar effect could be present. We added this to the discussion section.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The normal range of depression was listed here, we replaced it by a single norm score of the SCL90 depression
2. Table II was still confusing: we made appropriate changes.
3. Language: we completed these sentences.
4. Table III: this was indeed a three-group comparison using ANOVA. We added this to methods.
5. References: We agree, but we need these older references for the definitions of the inclusion criteria of our study (ICPC classification) and the references for the SCL-90 scales etc.