Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 21 August 2005

Reviewer: Per Farup

Reviewer's report:

General
The paper presents how patients with chronic non-specific abdominal complaints are managed in general practice, the patients’ health status and the course of the complaints. The topic is of great interest, and the paper contains a lot of interesting information, and the results deserve publication.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
My main objection to the paper is the presentation. It is wordy, in part illogical and the English language is poor and often difficult to understand. Some examples. Under the heading “Course of the complaints” there are several errors. It starts with: table I shows the “mean global improvement”. I do not find the “mean global improvement” in the table. The paragraph contains information about differences related to age and sex, but unrelated to the course of the complaints.

After having read the paper several times, I am still not able to understand everything. Some examples concerning the wording: Abstract – results. “48.3% of the patients reported any improvement”. What does it mean, did they report an improvement or not? Introduction – first paragraph. “A yet, however, diagnosis …… received little research attention”. What does it mean? Does it mean that since the report published in 1984 that annually 15 out 1000 patients visits their GP for new abdominal complaints, the topic has received little research attention? I disagree. The reference list consists of many old and outdated references, like the one by Kline et al (ref 23). There are newer and better reviews on treatment of IBS. And, how old are these data? Please let us know when the data were collected.

The statistical analyses are inappropriate. When comparing three groups (IBS, NUD and other) the comparisons should be made with ANOVA (or Kruskal-Wallis) followed by student t-test if significant differences are detected. It seems as if the authors have only performed t-tests comparing two-by-two and report significant difference between the extremes. The results after 6 and 12 months are nearly all left out.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests