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: 4 Date: 20 October 2005

Reviewer: Per Farup

Reviewer’s report:

General

The revised paper has taken into account the previous comments, but there is still room for improvement. As already said, the topic is of great interest, and the paper contains a lot of interesting information, and the results deserve publication

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Concerning the validity of the paper, I have two objections that the authors have perhaps not taken into the discussion in depth.

First: The inclusion criteria. The study includes three groups of patients: patients with permanent problems (no recovery expected), chronic problems for more than six months, and recurrent problems (more than three recurrences within a six-month period). It is no surprise that chronic problems (without expected recovery) remain chronic. Does the course differ between the three groups of patients included in the study? Do the inclusion criteria introduce a selection bias in the study? I think yes. It should be made even clearer in the abstract, discussion and conclusion that the results of this study are applicable only to patients with already chronic disorders, and are invalid for all patients with IBS, NUD and FGID.

Second – and that is in part mentioned. Only 47% of the patients responded to the baseline questionnaire, of whom only 79% responded after 18 months, giving a response rate of 37%. Selection bias?

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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

Table I: How can a mean norm score be 12-20?

Table II: I still do not understand column 2. The heading is “Improvement”, and I guess that the values are percentages. Why is the heading also “Score at follow-up”?

Language. I comment only on a couple of the problems. You write: “Patients older than 45 years of age scored higher on…..” Higher than what? Higher than the patients younger than 45 years old???

There are quite a few like this one. Page 15: “…. were used relatively few”. Please improve the language.

Table III: There are three groups (IBS, NUD and other). Have you used ANOVA first (if so – tell it in the section “statistics”) or only t-test between the groups two-by-two?

Most of the references are still rather old.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
What next?: Accept after minor essential 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.