Reviewer's report

Title: How does comorbidity affect cost of health care in patients with irritable bowel syndrome? A cohort study in general practice

Version: 1 Date: 1 January 2010

Reviewer: George Longstreth

Reviewer's report:

The authors thoroughly studied the health care costs in 164 general practice (GP) patients with IBS. The study is potentially important, as IBS is very common, and the report has novelty because of its focus on GP patients. The findings supplement other reports of the prominence of non-gastrointestinal symptoms and associated costs in patients with IBS.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) I am concerned about the possibility of enrichment of the study group with patients whose costs were high. Authors report that there were 830 consecutive GP patients with IBS defined by Rome II criteria, yet the GPs entered only 208 into the study after agreeing with the diagnosis. Authors should report exactly what the GPs were told about the study; in particular, were they told that the study would focus on health care costs, especially non-IBS costs? It seems unlikely that ¾ of the patients with Rome II-positive IBS did not actually have IBS, and authors should discuss the possibility that many of them had lower costs than the included patients. Authors should also report what the study nurses knew about the planned analysis, as they could have been biased in their data collection. Specifically, did they know that non-IBS costs would be compared with IBS costs?

2) The failure to find an association between costs and severity of IBS conflicts with previous findings; for example the uncited publication: Longstreth GF, et al. Am J Gastroenterol 2003;98:600-607. That article reported an association between severity of abdominal pain/discomfort and costs in 558 subjects with IBS. Authors should comment on the possibility that their method of measuring severity underlies this finding. They should also comment on whether the number of cases was too small to detect an association of severity with cost.

3) Finally, authors should provide further information on their regression analysis. Specifically, were their more than 10 events per variable, as is recommended?

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.