Reviewer's report

Title: Chronic fatigue syndrome after Giardia enteritis: clinical characteristics, disability and long-term sickness absence.

Version: 1 Date: 25 April 2011

Reviewer: Panayotis Ferentinos

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting report about clinical characteristics of CFS developing after a Giardia lamblia epidemic in Norway. I have some questions on sample recruitment and suggest several points to improve the presentation of the findings.

- Discretionary Revisions

1. Methods, par. 4: Abbreviations for SF-36 subscales (in accordance with those used in Fig.1) would be helpful (e.g. PF, RP, BP, etc).

2. Table 3: Abdominal complaints at referral had better be moved to a separate table and their method of coding briefly explained in a table footnote.

- Minor Essential Revisions

1. Tables 2 and 3 had better been numbered 1 and 2 as they are mentioned before table 1.

2. Methods, par. 3: the FSS cut-off score of #5 (not >5) is not referred in the original Krupp paper (where the cut-off score of 4 is reached) but in a paper by Lerdal et al 2005, which should be cited.

3. Methods: Type of fatigue onset is first mentioned in the discussion section. A mention about type of fatigue onset (acute, taking weeks and taking months) should be added and further explained (with preferably more precise time boundaries) in the Methods section first. For example, if a pt reported fatigue onset within 6-7 weeks should that be with weeks or months?

4. Methods, Results, par. 1: The gender distribution of the 1262 infected subjects as well as of the 96 referred participants should be added.

5. Results, par. 2: the percentages reported for depression and anxiety correspond to n=57 (not 58) pts (11/58=19.0%, 9/58=15.5%). Either correct percentages or otherwise explain (e.g. Was 1 pt not asked about prior depression or anxiety?).

6. Results: Add the specifier pts or participants as appropriate everywhere in the results section.

7. Results, par. 6: the cut-off score for both depression and anxiety in the HADS subscales is 8 (not 15) (Bjelland et al 2002). Please correct percentages or explain otherwise. The two HADS subscales had better be named HADS-A and HADS-D, according to the literature.
8. Discussion, par. 4 (‘There were little differences between the sexes both regarding concomitant symptoms such as abdominal symptoms and other symptoms in the early phase of the disease’): A mention of this finding should first be made in the results and then discussed here.

9. Discussion, par. 4 (‘at the time of referral females reported significantly more severe abdominal symptoms’): Again, the finding should first be mentioned in the results. Also, as shown in table 3, abdominal symptoms were only marginally (not significantly) different between males and females (p=0.06).

10. Discussion, par.2 & conclusion: I may have not understood correctly but pts in this study were previously exposed to Giardia (and not ‘never exposed to Giardia’ as stated).

11. Table 1: It should be somehow stated that employment status refers to 38 workers only and education status to 20 students only.

12. Table 2: the word ‘problems’ or ‘difficulties’ should be added to education, work and house or car items. Moreover, it should be somehow explained that figures correspond to n (%).

13. Table 3: Again, it should be somehow explained that figures correspond to n (%).

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Methods-patients: How were the 96 pts referred to the fatigue clinic? Were they previously assessed with e.g. a postal questionnaire? Sampling method should be further described. Moreover, calculation of the prevalence of CFS on the basis of the convenience sample of 96 pts only is wrong; A random sample of non-referrals should also be evaluated for CFS. Therefore, this should be included in a limitations section in the discussion.

2. Discussion, par. 3 (‘the frequency of CFS was significantly higher among females’): we cannot reach such a conclusion unless we know the gender distribution of the 1262 infected subjects.

3. Figure 1b (for male pts and controls) is missing!

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests