Reviewer's report

Title: Epidemiology of constipation in Europe and Oceania: a systematic review

Version: 2 Date: 13 November 2007

Reviewer: Vera Loening-Baucke

Reviewer's report:

General

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

The tables need extensive revision.

Table 1-3:
Should be sorted by how the data were collected, eg. Mailed questionnaire survey, interview etc. or by definition of constipation

The heading ‘Response Percentage’ should be replaced by ‘% of Responders’.

‘Factors significantly associated with increased odds for constipation’: you could leave the p value out and you don’t need to say ‘presented significantly higher constipation rates’ in all three tables.

The data that includes ‘constipation due to underlying disease’ can be left out.

Also under ‘Comments’ there should be only the female to male ratios, or agreements between different constipation criteria, but the rest could be excluded.

Table 2:
You have an asterisk next to ‘Defined below’, but I do not see any explanation for this asterisk.

For Iacono’s study, the study population should be newborns up to six months of age.

For the study by Bommelaer and Texerau you do not need to mention under ‘Comments’ that this population was different than the general French population. You already described where these subjects came from.

Table 3:
In Talley’s study could you explain what the waist/hip ratio has to do with constipation so as to understand without having to read the paper? Can you write that these were obese patients or whatever?
For the last study (Campbell) why don’t you bring the last four lines from ‘Comments’ over to ‘Definition of constipation’ and move the results of 20.3% under ‘Prevalence per 100’.

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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)

I suggest to focus only on functional constipation and to leave the few manuscripts with underlying disease out of the tables.

As suggested before, constipation is not a disease but a disorder. Only in a few places was ‘disease’ replaced by ‘disorder’.

At the end of the introduction the reference number is wrong, it should be reference #12.

On the next page, under Study Selection, you mention DPW for the first time as only three letters. Why can’t you say ‘defecations per week (DPW)’?

‘Laxates’ should be replaced by ‘laxatives’.

‘Considerably’ should be replaced by ‘respectively’, and the last sentence in the discussion should be deleted.

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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: 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