Reviewers report

Title: A self administered reliable questionnaire to assess lower bowel symptoms

Version: 1 Date: 20 November 2007

Reviewer: Ioannis Mouzas

Reviewers report:

General

There are several studies on differentiating between functional and non-functional bowel disease on the grounds of the symptoms. Already since the 70’s the so-called Manning criteria approach was one of the first efforts to utilize patients’ symptom clusters in order to differentiate between disease groups.

This manuscript deals with the development and first validation of a self administered questionnaire on lower bowel symptoms. It was validated in patients attending gastroenterologists or surgeons, before most probably being submitted to a colonoscopy.

The methods used for the creation of the questionnaire and for its validation are the standard ones. An advanced statistic evaluation was performed in order to assess test-retest reliability, content validity, and criterion validity. Besides test-retest within patients, agreement was also assessed between patients and their doctors. This last comparison is a very original one that should be listed in the strengths of this study.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached): No

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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): No

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore): The possible use of this or any other questionnaire as an instrument to elicit symptoms that may be used to predict colorectal cancer (as suggested by Selvachandran et al Lancet 2002) is not supported by the evidence. In any case, the data are inconsistent. Much more, there is an important implementation of this simple and valid questionnaire: its use by physicians as a guide of the clinical history (filled out as interviewer-administered questionnaire or by the patient, as in the present study) so as no symptoms are left non-assessed during the clinical consultation. I think that this point should be dealt more in depth in the discussion section.
What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.