Reviewer’s report

Title: Unmet need and psychological distress predict emergency department visits in community-dwelling elderly women: a prospective cohort study

Version: 2 Date: 31 March 2011

Reviewer: Laura Sands

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Compulsory changes:
I found the description of the hypothesized associations confusing. On page 7 the authors state, “…unmet need and psychological distress are independent predictors of ED visits.” They then state, “We also believe that there is a bidirectional, mutually reinforcing relationship between unmet need and psychological distress.” They did not test this hypothesis. The then state, “Finally, we hypothesize that psychological distress confounds and/or interacts with unmet need to increase the likelihood of visiting the ED.” On page 15 the authors state, “The association between met and unmet need, psychological distress and ED visits was assessed for interaction and confounding.” These last two statements suggest that the authors believe one variable moderates the effect of another variable on the outcome. However, it wasn’t clear which variable was the moderator variable (psychological distress or unmet need status), nor were results of interaction tests reported. On page 18 the authors stated, “When psychological distress was excluded from statistical modeling, the odds ratio of IADL unmet needs increased….” Excluding one variable from the equation does not test for a moderating effect.

Page 7, para 1: Their justification to exclude men was sufficient in the response letter, but too brief in the manuscript.

Page 7, para 2: It appears the first sentence in this paragraph has a typo and the word ‘with’ should be ‘without’.

Methods:
Page 11, para 1. On page 7 the authors describe their interest in comparing the effects of: 1) disability with met needs, 2) disability with unmet need(s), and 3) non-disability on health outcomes. On page 11, the authors describe their coding for disability and unmet needs status. Please explain how the coding allows the authors to compare the outcome between those without disability and those with disability and met needs.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable
**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.