Reviewer's report

Title: Caregiver burden in amyotrophic lateral sclerosis is more dependent on patients’ behavioral changes than physical disability: a comparative study.

Version: 2 Date: 15 July 2012

Reviewer: Ettore Beghi

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript by Dr Lillo and coworkers entitled “Caregiver burden in ALS is more dependent on patients’ behavioral changes than physical disability: a comparative study” is an interesting report based on the results of a mail survey of 140 caregivers of patients with ALS. Moderate to very severe depression was present in 23% of caregivers and burden was present in about half of them. The strongest predictor of high caregiver burden was patients’ abnormal behavior (Odds Ratio 1.4). Caregivers’ emotional state was also found to affect burden. On this basis, the authors warn physicians and other professionals caring ALS patients on the detection of these caregivers’ needs which, if properly addressed, are likely to benefit the patients’ well-being.

The topic addressed by the authors is relevant and the instruments used to assess patients’ and caregivers’ changes are fairly valid and reliable. However, a major query must be addressed in order to test the external validity of the study results. The authors base their findings and conclusions on the results of a mail interview done among members of a national MND Association. However, there is no indication in the text of the representativeness of this sample. We certainly know that members of a lay association do not represent the general population of the caregivers of the disease managed by that association. This should be acknowledged as a study limitation. In addition, the authors did not mention the numbers of persons addressed in the survey and the proportion of those who decided to participate. These details must be provided under the warning that a response rate less than 70% is a serious source of bias.

Minor queries
1. Participants & Methods, second page, last para: “Fischer’s exact test” perhaps reads “Fisher’s exact test”;
2. Results, first page and para: Given the large overlap between table 1 and text, the table should be deleted;
3. References: Please revise list because the indication of the journal is inconsistent across references (eg, reference # 4).

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests below.