Reviewer's report

Title: Exploring Social Cognition in Patients with Apathy Following Acquired Brain Damage.

Version: 4 Date: 23 August 2013

Reviewer: Ann Faerden

Reviewer's report:

Dear Editor

Thank you for letting me review this manuscript again.

The paper reports on important findings that contribute to a better understanding of the consequences of apathy. But I am sorry to say that the paper still lack a structure that makes it ready for publication. I also feel that the authors have been taken too easy on the comments made by this reviewer, since many of my former comments are repeated in this review. This review had also been easier had the authors indicated in a clear way where the corrections were made. I would suggest that the authors give page, paragraph and lines for corrections when replying to the reviewers.

The paper still lack a rigor concerning the order of reporting both in the paper and the Tables. This specially denotes to the naming of areas under study and order of tests. The paper also needs to be improved on information of the control group as well as patients. This also goes for the methods section concerning statistical methods. The result section needs to be more structured with clear headings and subheadings. Tables need still to be more clear in their format. The discussion needs to state more clearly from the start what is the most important and sound finding of this study and would be more clinically useful if they had one or two sentences following up on the rehabilitational value p 22, paragraph 2. Some minor misspellings needs to be corrected.

Order of reporting etc..

Example:

Order: In the Introduction TOM, Emotion perception, moral reasoning and social awareness is the order of the areas being studied. Later on in the Methods (M) - and Result (R) and Discussion (D) section this is turned around with TOM reported as number three in the M and then as the last under R. The same lack of order is for the other areas being studied as well as the order of the tests. In Table 4 foreseen harm is first and intended last, but in the writing on page 7 intention comes first and also on page 12 under results. The same is with the TOM tests in the paper (p 8) and Table 3. This confuses the reader and one wonders why this is done like this. Mentioning and reporting should have logic and when changed should make sense and not disorder as this reporting does to me. For readers not familiar with the tests such an order will help the reading of the paper.
Naming: Under R Moral sense test is a heading which seems to me to be a new word for moral reasoning? In the abstract facial expression of emotion is used which is not used in the introduction.

Table 3 has a heading: “Participants across tests”. What does this refer to?
Table 4 needs a more clar heading and I suggest Moral reasoning.
Table 6 is named emotion recognition but named emotion perception other places.

Control group and sociodemographics
The study also needs more information about the control group as well as the patients. How was the control recruited? And how did you control for "neuroligically intact"? Why did you choose only to test them on the areas under study and not also apathy, depression and executive function? What is not tested for should be reported clearly. I would like a Table with sociodemography for both patients and controls. I also would like the scores of AES and BDI reported with mean value and SD.

Method section
The methods still needs, in my opinion, more information about the specific statistical methods used in this study. This would make it easier to understand the reporting of results for a bigger audience. Also the results section have in my opinion a paragraph that usually are part of the methods section: page 12, second paragraph.

No cut off is given for depression and should be stated.

Naming og the TOM tests should find place here, since they are named in the Tables 5 as reality unknown and known.

Result and Tables
I suggest all results have a heading and then if needed subheadings. I suggest that the first part of the R section gets a heading (p 11). The following reporting p 12-16 have headings, but do not make distinctions between mainheading and subheadings for the tests and why they are reported in another order than the order they are introduced in is unclear. I suggest areas studied get a main heading and all tests their subheadings following the order they were introduced in the introduction and under the methods section. The order should have a logic.

Last paragraph p 14 is unclear to this reviewer why it is put in here and it also includes (p 15, line1) a sentence that in my opinion has a place in the discussion section.

Discussion
The discussion section I find mostly very good, but I would like the result section to state more clearly from the start what is the most important and sound finding and this study.
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.