Reviewer's report

Title: Longitudinal proxy measurements in multiple sclerosis: patient-proxy agreement on the impact of MS on daily life over a period of two years.

Version: 1 Date: 13 September 2007

Reviewer: Michael Hutchinson

Reviewer's report:

General Review

This is a well written but overlong rather discursive paper with too many references. The main message seems to be that proxy measurements are more reliable/ better over time than patient measurements. One difficulty is the small number of patients in the study and the relatively small number of stable and changed patients. 

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

We are told EDSS was estimate at both time points but that EDSS and cognition and HADS had no effect on the patient/proxy assessments. We are not told what happened to the EDSS over time other than the median change from 4.5 to 5.5. If one groups the patients by using change/no change in the EDSS as an anchor – using the physician’s assessment as a standard then what happens to proxy and patient measures?

There is the difficulty that neurological experts measured the EDSS at baseline but a medical student measured it at follow-up. The finding that stable patients reported worse MSIS-29 scores than changed patients is counter-intuitive—one might expect stable patients to show a response-shift phenomenon—but it is the deteriorated patients who are showing this. Response-shift should at least be discussed as an explanation of the reporting difference between proxy and patient.

Some of the discussion drifts in the methods section which should be considerably shortened (page 7, lines 9-11). The results section in the abstract is too short; the background section too long. OVERALL EVERYTHING IS TOO LONG- GIVEN THE RELATIVELY MODEST FINDINGS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF TYPE 2 ERRORS WHICH THE AUTHORS ACKNOWLEDGE

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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 whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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 I have no competing interests