Reviewer's report

Title: Parents' perceptions of the quality-of-life impact of childhood atopic dermatitis disease states

Version: 1 Date: 24 May 2004

Reviewer: Petra Warschburger

Reviewer's report:

General
The paper addresses an important subject in dermatological research, quality of life considerations of patients or caregivers.

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

1) I find the title of the paper misleading.

2) The background of the study is not very clear. The authors report only few empirical studies dealing with the quality of life of parents with a child suffering from atopic dermatitis. What are the specific hypothesis of the study?

3) A thorough description of the respondents is missing. How did the authors get information about disease severity? How were the different severity levels defined? Do you have any information about how valid the scorings of the parents are?

4) The description of the methods of the study does not allow a thorough understanding of the used instruments. Why and how did the authors change their scenarios and questionnaire. A example of a scenario would be helpful. What about the pilot test? Is the questionnaire reliable and valid? Why did the authors use five severity levels for AD (how defined: SCORAD? disease status? necessary medication?), but only one scenario for asthma resp. wearing glasses? What is the rationale behind that procedure.

5) In my opinion, the results were predictable. The authors conclude that the mean value of the preference scores decline with the disease severity of AD. An instrument with discriminant validity should differentiate between groups in that way. Furthermore, the difference between the groups are very small. Taking into account the number of respondents, this difference is statistically, but not clinically relevant.

6) The implications of the study remain unclear. In which way can these results help to evaluate medical therapies? What do we know about parental perceptions of different diseases (there is a bunch of literature available)?

7) A main limitation of the study is the use of the Internet. The authors discuss that point, but mainly on the basis of the missing possibility of asking questions or the high socioeconomic status. The response rate of 22% is a major problem because of a possible response bias.

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?: Reject because scientifically unsound

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
None.