Reviewer's report

Title: Attitudes towards physical health in people with severe mental illness: a cross-sectional comparative study

Version: 1 Date: 28 March 2011

Reviewer: Brian Shiner

Reviewer's report:

Review for BMC Psychiatry
"Attitudes towards physical health in people with severe mental illness: a cross-sectional study"
Buhagiar, Parsonage, and Osborn

OVERALL IMPRESSION:

This is a well-written report that takes on the important subject or early mortality in people with severe mental illness (SMI). While we do know that SMI is associated with the loss of decades of lifespan, the exact mechanisms of this deficit are an active area of research and are likely multi-factorial. Poor health behaviors are one likely factor. The authors made many good decisions in the conceptualization of their study. They used well-validated models of health behavior change and health beliefs to inform their design. They chose measures based upon their theoretic models and these measures are well-validated and have been used in previous studies. Their analysis was clear and understandable.

However, the authors committed one major conceptual flaw. Concerns about early mortality in SMI arise from the comparison of persons with SMI with the general population. SMI is not consistently defined. While the authors cite studies (references 1-3) that equate SMI to psychotic disorders (and do so in their own study), others, such as Colton and Manderscheid take a wider view of SMI and define it functionally when people have a DSM-IV diagnosis that substantially interferes with major life activities (Colton CW, Manderscheid RW. Congruencies in increased mortality rates, years of potential life lost, and causes of death among public mental health clients in eight states, Preventing Chronic Disease, 2006; 3(2):1-14). This seems an important point as half of the people in the authors' sample, regardless of whether they are in the "SMI" group, cites mental illness as a major barrier to improving their physical health. To make their desired comparison, the authors would have had to compare their SMI group to members of the general population rather than to other clients at the mental health center. Therefore, I have one major compulsory revision:

Major Compulsory Revision 1: This study should be reframed as a comparison of health behaviors and health beliefs in persons with psychotic vs. non-psychotic mental illness.
OTHER SMALLER POINTS:

Background – In the third paragraph the authors outline their theoretic model. While the two models they use are reasonable choices, they introduce the theories with "In general..." This wording seems to imply that the sentence that follows summarizes all relevant models and draws general lessons, which it does not. It would be better if wording simply reflected that these are two models among many.

Minor Essential Revision 1: The authors should note in the text that they are specifically referring to Prochaska and DiClemente’s transtheoretical model and to Rotter’s locus of control framework.

Methods – In the data analysis section, the authors switch into the passive voice.

Minor Essential Revision 2: The authors should rewrite the analysis section in the active voice.

Discussion – In the limitations the authors do not acknowledge that the comparison they are making in health beliefs (psychotic vs. non-psychotic mental illness) is not the same that the comparison in health (SMI vs. general population) that spurred the study.

Minor Essential Revision 3: The authors should cite this mismatch as a limitation.

**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