Reviewer's report

Title: Prospective study of factors influencing conditional discharge from a forensic hospital: the DUNDRUM-3 programme completion and DUNDRUM-4 recovery structured professional judgement instruments and risk.

Version: 1 Date: 19 November 2012

Reviewer: Michael J Vitacco

Reviewer’s report:

It was my pleasure to review the paper entitled, “Prospective study of factors influencing conditional discharge from a forensic hospital: The DUNDRUM-3 programme completion and DUNDRUM-4 recovery structured professional judgment instruments and risk” for BMC Psychiatry. This is an interesting naturalistic study that came about due to a change in law that allowed extensive data to be collected on an understudied population. There are several strengths to this paper.

However, there is a major issue with the paper that requires a substantial change in the manner the paper is conceptualized. Notably, this is not a predictive study at all. This is a study where several risk instruments were utilized and the results shared with a committee that ultimately made discharge decisions. This factor is noted in the Discussion; however, the extent this poisons the study is minimized. Given the confound it is not surprising there were AUCs in the .90s. This paper would work better if it were simplified and thought of as a descriptive study of individuals considered for and granted conditional release. Otherwise, you are employing statistics designed for prediction in a study that has a fatal flaw. There are other minor issues that include the following:

1. Not mentioning the Risk-Need-Responsivity factor for conditional release,
2. State the importance of risk assessment in the introduction.
3. More complete description of the DUNDRUM measures.
4. Adding age/ethnicity into the participants’ descriptions.
5. Not sure the secondary analysis is needed unless you are going to make an argument that scales need to be changed based on item analyses.
6. The paper could use a good editing (e.g., page 8, “Tio” should be “to”).
7. The text contains a lot of extra information on the statistical analyses, which are also found in the tables.
8. There are too many tables and that is hard to follow.

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests' below.