Reviewer’s report

Title: Are psychosocial difficulties common across brain disorders?

Version: 2 Date: 12 June 2012

Reviewer: Ulrich Hegerl

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The authors addressed the relevant question what psychosocial difficulties or disabilities as assessed by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) go along with short-term changes in different health-related outcomes (like the General Health Scale) in patients suffering from psychiatric and neurological diseases (depression, bipolar disorders, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease, migraine, traumatic brain injury, stroke).

Overall, this longitudinal, observational investigation contributes to a clinically relevant research question. The presentation is clear in most parts and the data have been carefully analyzed. There are some points which should be addressed in a revision.

Major compulsory revisions

1. Methods – Study design: There is a high overlap of T1 and T2 (T1: 10-151 days; T2: 17-188 days). This fact should be mentioned as a methodological limitation. Moreover, it will be interesting for the reader to know the reasons for this extremely high range of days.

2. Methods – Measures: Page 9, line 1: The authors mention that “the diagnosis was based on International Classification of Diseases (ICD)-10 criteria.” Were the diagnoses verified clinical diagnoses or based on a structured clinical interview?

3. Methods – Measures: Beck Depression Inventory II: Why did the authors decide to use a self-report instrument for the assessment of depression? It would have been more convincing to use an assessment tool by physicians like the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale.

4. Results: The fact that 103 ICF categories had to be excluded from the analyses should be mentioned as an important bias in the discussion.

5. Results – Page 14, lines 18-19: “Age was a significant predictor just for WHODAS II score, with higher age being related to worse health.” According to Table 4, there is a negative association between age and the WHODAS II score suggesting that higher age is associated with better health (estimate: -2.27; p < 0.05)!

6. Results – Pages 15-16: The authors report in detail which ICF categories were significantly associated with health outcomes in the sample. However, they do not specify the direction of the associations. For example, it would be important
to note that sleep problems were significantly associated with worse mental functioning.

7. Discussion: The PARADISE project should be described with more detail.

Minor essential revisions
None.

Minor issues not for publication:
# References 17 and 24: Please substitute “Ustun” by “Üstün”.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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 that I have no competing interests.