Reviewer's report

Title: Habitual Prospective Memory in Schizophrenia

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Reviewer: Fergus Craik

Level of interest: A paper whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Advice on publication: Accept after discretionary revisions

The study was well designed and involved an appropriate number of participants. The fact that the controls scored significantly lower on current IQ and on digit span tests gives rise to a problem in ascribing the result to schizophrenia per se, as opposed to simply low IQ. Your conclusion would be stronger if you could show that non-patient controls of similarly low IQ do not make the same number of omission errors as the present patients do. If you have a reasonable range of IQ scores in the patient group it would support your case to show that there is no correlation between number of omission errors and either IQ or backward digit span. If there is such a correlation, then your conclusion that your results reflect schizophrenic symptoms as such would seem to be a bit shaky.

I was not convinced by the arguments that your present findings do not reflect some general decline in IQ or in working memory (WM) because there is an asymmetry between omission errors and repetition errors. It is more likely that some types of error are simply easier to make, so that as IQ drops (e.g.) some errors occur before others (cf. your pages 11 & 13). Another limitation of the study is its applicability to real-life habitual tasks such as taking medications. The present findings may generalize, but it is not certain that they will. As you say, it will be important to back these present results up with a more ecologically valid study (p. 12).

With regard to revisions, here are some suggestions:

pp. 3-4. Expand the section on PM/RM differences and the distinction between time-based and event-based tasks for the general reader.

p.5. I had trouble with your terminology, mainly because I think of the action coming before the response. I would spell out the 4 types--e.g. Action-yes/Report-yes; Action-yes/Report-no ("repetition"); Action-no/Report-yes ("omission"); Action-no/Report-no. It's clumsy but less ambiguous. I would also like to see the complete 2 x 2 table of action x response data for the two groups.

The Discussion could be cut down somewhat.

Competing interests:

None declared.