Reviewer's report

Title: Polypharmacy in Psychiatric Practice

Version: 1 Date: 8 March 2004

Reviewer: Lars BJerrum

Reviewer's report:

General
Question posed:
Clear, well defined.

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

Method:
How was “the representative sample” of patients identified?
Information about prescriptions was obtained from OMI-AP – what does this abbreviation mean?
OMI-AP contains prescriptions from patients in primary health care. How was information about diagnoses obtained from patients in primary health care? Did the GPs classify patients according to ICD10?
Polypharmacy was defined as the use of two or more psychiatric medications. How did the authors explore concurrent use of drugs based on information about prescriptions? Did they have information about doses and duration of treatment for each drug used? Was polypharmacy defined as “overlapping treatment” on a certain day, during a certain period, what was the observation-time?

Results
Table II shows medication prescribed for 2647 cases. In the column % of patients the total response is 142.7% - how can the figure increase 100%?
Nothing is mentioned about non-responders in material and methods and it is not clear what % of responses and % of patients refer to. 84.3% of patients were treated with benzodiazepine, and 2.9% with other types of tranquilizers. In the text the figure for benzodiazepines tranquilizers is 87.3%.
Why not the same figure in text and table?

According to the introduction the research question was to “analyse the prevalence of polypharmacy with psychiatric drugs…identifying possible predictors of polypharmacy. The answer to this question should be included in the conclusion.
The conclusion proposes to develop indicators for appropriate polypharmacy. Appropriateness of polypharmacy was not investigated in this study.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

NASMHPD (last page, methods) should be written in full text first time it is mentioned

In the first line of table II (tranquilizers) % of patients is 87.3% which I calculate to 2310.831 – but the table shows the figure 2305 (count). More explanation is needed to understand how the authors have arrived to the figures and percentages given in table II.
In the text referring to table III (second paragraph on the second page of results) it is not clear what the figures refer to (percentages - I assume). For several categories the figures are over hundred – are patients counted more than one time?
The authors write: “The more prevalent prescriptions include: 14.7% of patients with one SSRI, 13.2% with one atypical antipsychotic etc....”
Do the figures refer to what was written on the prescription or do they refer to the type and number of drugs the patient was prescribed on a certain day or within a certain period?

Discussion
It would improve the paper if the authors relate their own results to other studies on the same topic and comment on the possible weaknesses related to their own data (eg. How did prescriptions reflect the use of drugs?).

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

none