Reviewer’s report

Title: The Improved Clinical Global Impression Scale (iCGI): development and validation in depression

Version: 1 Date: 6 July 2006

Reviewer: Rolf R. R Engel

Reviewer’s report:

General
This MS reports on a study aimed to improve the reliability of the Clinical Global Impression (CGI) in depressive patients by adding an interview, a more specific response scale and a Delphi procedure. As there have been attempts in the past to improve the CGI in other psychiatric disorders, this attempt seems to be worthwhile.

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

The authors found that the new response scale did not improve the interrater reliability significantly nor did the Delphi procedure. Averaging over four raters improved reliability most, however, this is not amazing. The authors only averaged the results of the four raters that worked with the new response scale. It would be interesting to hear if averaging over the three raters working with the original scale did similarly improve reliability.

The authors also found as a side-result that the CGI was more sensitive to show patients improvement from week one to week three in the hospital than the Hamilton rating scale or the SCL-90. They discuss this result as promising as it could improve the statistical power of a study. This part of the discussion is not convincing. The problem of the CGI has always been their lack in specificity, not in sensitivity. The authors have tried to improve the specificity by adding the new response scale, but they could test only the interrater reliability and the sensitivity, not the specificity. When the CGI is much more sensitive than the Hamilton depression rating scale, than one must discuss, that obviously it responds to characteristics of the patients that are not covered in the Hamilton scale. There is a good chance that these characteristics than have nothing to do with depression but with other features, may be only with time in the hospital.

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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)

There are stylistic inconsistencies in the references section.

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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 whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

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