Reviewer’s report

Title: An Approach to Measure Compliance to Clinical Guidelines in Psychiatric Care.

Version: 2 Date: 7 April 2008

Reviewer: Stefan Weinmann

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MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS:

This is an interesting study dealing with an effort to evaluate if structured implementation of a depression guideline is associated with an increase in compliance with certain performance indicators. Patient records were used to measure guideline adherence. This is a controlled before-and-after-study. It is not reported how the intervention clinics were selected, there seems to have been some kind of self-selection. It needs to be explained how the selection process took place. In order to get an impression on the comparability of the participating clinics measures of clinic structure have to be reported. The study was controlled (as mentioned on page 12), but not randomized. Many factors may have been responsible for the differences between intervention and control clinics, and this needs to be discussed in the Discussion section. On the whole, more limitations have to be addressed in the Discussion section.

It has to be stressed that measures were only process indicators, there were no outcome indicators. Patients were not assessed independently.

How can we be sure that not only an increasing intensity of documentation in the intervention clinics but a real increase in indicator compliance took place? It would be good to have some more information how the clinics were told to document treatment processes, and if there were differences between intervention and control clinics in the way they were advised or handled.

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS:

Abstract: It would be helpful to mention the kind of guidelines evaluated (e.g. Swedish evidence-based guidelines developed by …). In Conclusions, as the study design does not allow causal attributions, it can only be said that in this study there was a higher conformance to process indicators or measures in the intervention clinics as compared to the control clinics.

Background:

May be the systematic review on guideline implementation in psychiatry could be mentioned as this review summarizes the evidence in the field and describes the kind of interventions used to implement guidelines (Weinmann S, Koesters M,


Page 4: the Medical advisory board for Psychiatric ???” The wording should be improved.

This study reports the findings of a controlled before-and-after study ....

Methods:
How were clinics chosen? Could certain baseline parameters (clinics, patients?) be given?

Page 6: Which patient records were chosen?

The paper would profit from a more detailed description of the kind of intervention used to implement guidelines (internationally used interventions: academic detailing?, multifaceted intervention?)

Page 12: The indicators did NOT assess results (“outcomes”) but were all process measures. No scales or endpoints were assessed.

Discussion:
More limitations of the study need to be addressed.

One weakness of the study is the discrimination between documentation and execution of the treatment process. Beyond the evaluation of patient records there was no independent assessment.

There was only an association between higher indicator compliance and guideline implementation; no direct causal effects can be claimed.

Points
1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   - The question needs to be posed more clearly in the Background section.
2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   - Methods may be described in a more detailed fashion.
3. Are the data sound?
   - Data are sound despite a quite simple statistical analysis.
4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data
deposition?
- Reporting needs to be improved. Table 1 needs to be improved. There are no dfs available, t-values are not mentioned, there are no p values.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
- Discussion and conclusions need some efforts to be more balanced. More limitations of the study have to be addressed.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
- More limitations need to be stated. This is a small study. Results are based on patient records only.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
- Yes they cite important references. However, some more references may be added (see general comments)

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
- Yes, the title does (it is in deed an approach to measure compliance to guidelines…). The Abstract may be improved in order to contain more information.

9. Is the writing acceptable?
- The writing is acceptable, but may be improved.

**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 published

**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.