Reviewer's report

Title: A 20-year prospective study on mortality and causes of death among hospitalized opioid addicts in Oslo

Version: 1 Date: 8 July 2007

Reviewer: Knud Juel

Reviewer's report:

General

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

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

My most important comment is about "drug dependence" vs. "other diseases". I do understand what is written about the problem. But I think it is unsatisfactory to have a category of deaths called "other diseases" containing almost all the deaths and the cause of death is "drug dependence", a very relevant cause of death in this study population. Please find a solution?

SMR is sometimes written standard mortality ratios and sometimes standardized mortality ratios. Please make it consistent.

The study population is from Oslo and the standard mortality rates are from Norway. Could that give a too high SMR because of higher mortality in the Capital?

There are some inconsistencies in the reference to tables. I don't think all tables are mentioned in the text.

In the methods section is written "Causes of death were classified ...". The same classification is used for the study population and for the general population?

"Four patients had no specific cause of death ..." and then three deaths are mentioned.

Ethics. "given the possible effect of increasing suicide risk if the patients were asked to be checked according to whether they were alive or dead". That sentence is a little bit difficult for me.

The results section could be shortened. There are some overlap to the contents of the tables.
Page 8, line 14. "and 29 patients..." should be "and 30 patients".

Page 9, line 3. There are some confusions here and in the tables about the number of violent deaths, 2 or 7.

Main and additional cause of death. Would it be better to use the words underlying and contributory?

Page 10, line 19. "No difference between age groups". Have the authors made any tests for age differences?

Page 11. The SMR decreased by time period. Another reason for some of the decrease could be that the level of mortality in the general population increases by time period thereby making it more difficult to get a high SMR.

I prefer general population compared to background population, but not both in the same text.

Page 12, line 6. "three as cardiovascular deaths" should be "two..."

Table 3. Write deaths in stead of n. drop n=93, n=92 and n=185

Table 4. The sum of the rows does not equal the total.

Table 5. B20.1 in stead of B201

Table 6 can be omitted

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential 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, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests