Reviewer's report

Title: Sickness-certification practice in different clinical settings; a survey of all physicians in a country.

Version: 1 Date: 24 September 2010

Reviewer: Ueli Bollag

Reviewer's report:

The authors have embarked upon an important issue by extending their inquiry about sickness certification to other groups of physicians, and not only including PHC/GPs.

My main critique pertains to the style and the length of the manuscript. The authors continuously upgrade their own findings and degrade those of others in the same field. Expressions like "limited scientific evidence", "the number of studies was low and sample sizes were small and often very biased", "knowledge is scarce", "most studies had low scientific quality" are used repeatedly and are a sign of little respect towards other researchers in the field. Except for the Abstract which is informative, the text needs to be shortened and become more concise. I will try to give some examples that underpin my statements:

Background:
- "Those different tasks can be summarised as...(Ref 1)No need to list the tasks in detail as you have referenced them.
- "Since then, some more studies have been published with limited sizes and not contributing...(Ref 12). I think that the qualitative study by Hussey et al. greatly advanced our understanding of the process of sickness certification. That study helped us to design and realize a study on sickness certification by PC physicians (GPs, paediatricians and internists), generating both quantitative and qualitative findings on this topic (Swiss Med Wkly 2007;137:341-346).

Methods:
- "company Cegedim AB". Outside readers do not know what this company means in the Swedish context.
- "the response rate was 60.6%" and "response rate was somewhat higher among women and older physicians" belong to the Results's section.
- I am not clear about your division between specialists and non specialists.

Results:
- the data on problems experienced by physicians when writing certificates for absenteeism, and more especially the splitting into three categories (few, medium, high) may be spurious (Table 3 and 4). I doubt whether the answers to your questionnaire would be the same if repeated - most qualitative studies, of course, can be criticised for subjectivity.
In summary, the objective of your study is sound but the reporting needs to focus on own findings instead of disqualifying other studies in the same field. The text needs considerable shortening and flow.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

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

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.