Reviewer’s report

Title: Sickness absence in musculoskeletal disorders - patients' experiences of interactions with the Social Insurance Agency and health care. A qualitative study.

Version: 1 Date: 9 August 2010

Reviewer: Kurt Svardsudd

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Major Compulsary Revisions

Minor Essential Revisions

1. There is diversity the manuscript in terms of disability pension. In page 4 and other places it is called “sickness/activity allowance”, a translation of the current Swedish term. However, for an international audience this term is un-interpretable. I suggest that the internationally recognised term “disability pension” be used throughout the manuscript.

2. In page 4, paragraph 2, second line, it says “… leading to work disability”. I suppose the authors mean “leading to reduced work capacity”, which is the professional term.

3. Page 4, paragraph 2: What is meant by “The health care system is responsible for the medical rehabilitation for sickness absentees as well as all patient”? Are the patients responsible for medical rehabilitation???

4. Page 4, paragraph 2, second last line: throughout the manuscript the SIA and medical service are called “actors” or “agents”. I prefer “agents” because they are not actors on their own but acting on behalf of an authority (government or county council).

5. Page 4, paragraph 2, bottom line: “… as well as in terms of the national economy”. I doubt the agents’ performance may affect the national economy, but it definitely affects the economy of the national social insurance.

6. Page 4, paragraph 3, first line: the expression “… end of the nineties and the beginning of the 21st century …” is asymmetric since the two centuries have different verbal forms. Such asymmetries tend to hamper reading. I suggest “end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century”.

7. Page 6, first indented section: “Rheumatology Clinic”. Do you mean a clinic, which means an out-patient facility (Swedish “mottagning”) or do you mean Department (Swedish “klinik”)?
8. Page 6, first paragraph after the numbered sections, first line: “The fifteen social insurances officers” should be “The fifteen social insurance officers”.

9. Page 6, first paragraph after the numbered sections, second line: “… were recruited by randomly choosing from a list…”. The authors might consider an alternative, more professional wording, such as “… were randomly sampled from a list …”.

10. Page 6, first paragraph after the numbered sections, second last line: “… informants had to have been …” could perhaps be re-phrased as “… informants must have been …”.

11. Page 7, paragraph 2, line 2: “… and obtain a sense of the whole”. The whole of what? A word seems to be missing.

12. Page 7, last paragraph, first line: “Several steps had been taken…”. Do you mean “Several steps were taken…”?

13. Page 7, last paragraph, bottom two lines and other places: what does “… according to common agreement” mean? Some sort of standard, or do you mean consensus between interpreters?

14. Page 8, Results section, first paragraph, line 5: “There were no answers…”. A better wording might be “There were no responses…”.

15. Page 9, line 4: “…overview of the background factors…”. A better phrasing might be “…overview of the informant characteristics…”.

16. Page 9, paragraph 3: “…that ran as a thread…” should probably be “…that ran as a common thread…”.

17. Page 12, paragraph 3: “You have studied…” is very Swenglish and not very easy to understand. Do you mean “You have an education…”?

18. Page 15, second last paragraph: “Depressions were common…”. I would have phrased it “Depression was common…”.

19. Page 15, last paragraph: “As soon as anything…” should be “As soon as something…”.

20. Page 16, paragraph 3: “I’d like a…” is not crystal clear. Does it mean “I had like a…” or “I would like a…”?

21. Page 19, line 6: there is a reference to Figure 1, but in my copy of the manuscript there are no figures at all. Do you mean Table 1?.

22. Acknowledgements: the first sentence is incomplete, which may be overcome with the wording “Many thanks are due to all…”.

23. The table legends do not follow the author instructions. According to these there should be a headline and a descriptive legend. In Table 1 it might have the
form “Table 1 Informant characteristics”, and then on the next line
“Socio-economic and sick leave status data” or something similar.

24. As pointed out by the authors, representative sampling is not a big issue in
qualitative research, but rather transferability of results. Another interesting issue
is saturation, i.e., whether all aspects on the interview material were obtained
and taken into account (Swedish mättnad). This circumstance is not mentioned in
the manuscript. I think it should. Even better would be to have this issue
illustrated in a table, for instance with interviews as lines and aspects as
columns, and with each aspect covered in a specific interview marked with a tick.

25. The vast majority of the points raised above concern language. The
manuscript is rather heterogenic regarding this aspect. Parts of the manuscript
are written in excellent English, whereas other parts suffer from “Swenglish”,
sometimes to a substantial degree. I thing this manuscript deserves to be read
with no breaks due to vague or un-interpretable passages. I therefore strongly
suggest a professional English language revision.

Discretionary Revisions
26. Page 6, paragraph 2: “Informants were recruited using different gatekeepers
...”. I suggest the wording “Informants were recruited using various gatekeepers
...”.

27. Numbered or bullet sections in a text tend to reduce readability. I suggest the
authors consider conversion of the two numbered sections into plain text, for
instance in the form “Fifteen social ... the study. Moreover, advertisements were
put ... Metro”.

28. It is customary to present citations in italic mode, as the authors do, but also
with a left-sided indentation of the text. That would facilitate reading.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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