Reviewer's report

Title: Length of sick leave - Why not ask the sick-listed? Sick-listed individuals predict their length of sick leave more accurately than professionals

Version: 1 Date: 5 July 2004

Reviewer: Kurt SvÄrdsudd

Reviewer's report:

General
Interesting study on an important issue

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

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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)
1. Spelling error in page 9 line 9 from top. Should be: "... between responders and non-responders ..."
2. Table 3 line 5 in the table body: "0.42)" should be "0.42".
3. Table 4 first line of the table body: ">=8 weeks" should be "Sick-listed >=8 weeks".
4. Figure 2: the error bars for "NIO assessors of all sick leaves" are not limited by short horizontal lines like the other two groups and they are all highly assymetrical. Is that as it should be?

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
5. The study design is rather complex as it reads and it is sometimes difficult to understand which group is which. I propose that the authors provide a flow chart inserted as a new figure 1 where the patient or certificate flow through the study might be more easy to follow.
6. In page 10, line 7 it says "... using a cut-off in the predicted length of 8 weeks." Similar wordings are used in the captions of tables 3 and 4. To me the meaning is not quite clear. Does it mean that the prediction was made knowing the course up until 8 weeks of sick-leave? The meaning is probably something else since it would be nonsense to predict sick-listing until 26 weeks knowing the course ">=26 weeks" (table 4). Please provide a more straight-forward and descriptive wording.
7. In page 7, the second and third paragraphs under the heading "Observed length of sick leaves" are to me interesting results of this study. The authors should consider to move this section and insert it as the first part of the Results section.
8. The same applies to the second paragraph of the discussion. It is interesting, but to me it is a result based on the study data. Perhaps it should be inserted as a last paragraph of the results section "Sensitivity, specificity ...". In this way the impact on the reader might be even better.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No
Declaration of competing interests:

None