Reviewer's report

Title: Does a self-referral counselling program reach doctors in need of help? A comparison with the general Norwegian doctor workforce.

Version: 2 Date: 19 November 2006

Reviewer: Bo Runeson

Reviewer's report:

General

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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)

This is a paper of relevance to the important issue of mental distress evident in large groups of European physicians today. The support supplied to Norwegian physicians at the Villa Sana is obviously an ambitious effort to make a difference. It describes an intervention that may enhance physicians to apply for help to a larger extent than in other support programs. The paper describes characteristics of physicians who apply for help, and includes a comparison with a sample of Norwegian physicians in general.

The question posed by the authors, does the program reach the physicians mostly in need of help, may in one sense be difficult to answer with the methodology chosen. A comparison with a general sample may show that doctors who apply for help have more problems than doctors in general. But, it may of course not show to what extent Norwegian physicians in the need of help are reached by the program. That would warrant another epidemiological approach. In that sense, even the title of the paper may need a slight revision.

The paper is clear and easy to read. There are a few language problems that may be corrected. E.g. the word “deleterous” used a couple of times may need to be changed to “deleterious”? Commas may also need to be checked.

The sample studied represents 94% of the physicians taking part in the program, which is a very satisfying participation. Methods for collecting data and used for comparisons of the samples seem adequate. The questions concerning sick-leave and the corresponding figures in the results section, did they include physicians on permanent sick-leave i.e. who were in the process of retirement? I suppose not, but that may be useful to declare for the readers.

The Discussion is well balanced and knowledge of the literature is very sufficient.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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

Statistical review: No
Declaration of competing interests:

I have previously taken part in the same symposium as the first author of the paper as a chairman.