Reviewer's report

Title: Low validity of self-report in identifying recent mental health diagnosis among U.S. service members completing Pre-Deployment Health Assessment (PreDHA) and deployed to Afghanistan, 2007: A retrospective cohort study.

Version: 2 Date: 2 July 2009

Reviewer: Linda McCauley

Reviewer's report:

This manuscript addresses an important question regarding the validity of the pre-deployment screening questionnaire used by the DoD. The topic is relevant and timely.

Major revisions:

The paper does have one major methodological issue that dampens overall enthusiasm for publication. All mental health diagnoses are grouped together for the major analyses of the study. The inclusion of ADHD is a major concern. I don’t believe that most people consider attention deficit disorders as mental disorders. Clearly many people work and are completely functional with this diagnosis and it is likely that many veterans would not respond positively to # 7 on the questionnaire if this is their only diagnosis. The authors need to break out their analyses looking that this group separately to see if the validity rates change.

Other minor concerns and questions:

Page 3: 1st para: What is mefloquine used for?

Page 5: Why were phobic disorders and personality disorders excluded? Are they never an issue in military populations?

Page 8: Was the increased prevalence of mental disorders consistent across all diagnoses? How were combat and non-combat occupations determined? Could the analyses be done for active versus reserve troops?

Page 10: 2nd paragraph is unclear. On a screening questionnaire, if the respondent answered #7 negatively, what would the examiner be looking at to determine a non-deployable disposition? Needs clarification. Also if the examiner wrote they were non deployable, how could they be deployed?

Page 14; 1st paragraph. The sentence regarding the deployment of persons reporting bipolar and manic disorders is not clear.

Page 15, 2nd paragraph. Statement about the increased sensitivity of the question is unclear.

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:

declare that I have no competing interests’