Reviewer's report

Title: Do COPD patients take timely measures in periods of symptom deterioration?

Version: 1 Date: 11 March 2011

Reviewer: Carl Llor

Reviewer's report:

The paper is interesting, innovative, well-written and pertinent. The authors wanted to investigate patient’s decisions and self-management behavior during symptomatic days and exacerbations episodes. This topic is very important since some recent papers have alerted about the high percentage of unreported exacerbations among COPD patients. I have no major comment. Only some minor issues have been submitted to the authors. In my opinion if they could address these minor aspects it will make this paper more understandable for the readers.

MINOR REVISIONS:

When the authors refer to the attention on energy conservation I would encourage them to explain it more thoroughly, at least the first time they refer to it in the Introduction. They have to explain why they take the three types of action into account.

The authors have to explain why so many patients did not want to participate in this short follow-up study. They are talking about some reasons—for instance, 36 patients were unmotivated but they fail to explain more in-depth the reasons why they dropped out. I encourage the authors to comment on this issue, particularly, they should explain or better change the sentence ‘a convenience sample of COPD patients were recruited’.

They do not comment on the quality of the diaries. One of the limitations of this type of studies, in which symptom diaries are used, is their quality. They say that 9% of diaries were incomplete. Even though the follow-up was actually short, only six weeks, I find this percentage too low. I would like to know the values omitted in the remaining diaries and their quality. I consider that the authors should be more cautious and be humble when addressing this issue.

I would like to know if there were any differences in the outcome variables between patients discharged from hospitals and those who attended the outpatient clinics. Since the authors have got the information about the lung functional status of these patients I would like to know the differences observed between the subjects with a more conserved functional status and those with lower FEV1 measurements.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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